



# STUDIES IN AMERICAN LITERATURE





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AMERICAN  
LITERATURE

WHITMAN, EMERSON, MELVILLE  
AND OTHERS

by  
Egbert S. Oliver

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## *Foreword*

These studies have appeared occasionally over a period of twenty-five years. They come out of the by-paths of the life of a university faculty member. Some of them before magazine publication were originally presented as lectures. Some were published in magazines or journals in India; some in journals in the United States now not easily accessible. In a few of them there is a slight amount of overlapping of material. Through many of the studies runs a theme of interest in the gradual penetration of Asian influence into American literature and culture. Some of the essays not originally published in India have been reprinted in Asian periodicals.

These studies are permitted to reappear in their original form, with only an occasional correction of a misprint. I extend my thanks to the journals which originally carried the studies—and to the National Council of the Teachers of English—and to those friends and students of literature in India and in the United States who at various times have suggested to me the desirability of making available some of these studies.

These essays are from *College English*, *The New England Quarterly*, the *Philadelphia Forum*, *Advance*, the *Korean Survey*, *Today's Speech*, the *Journal of the University of Poona*, the *Literary Criterion*, the *Emerson Society Quarterly*, the *University of Kansas City Review*, *United Asia*, the *Western Humanities Review*.



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# *The Lasting Influence* *of* Emerson

A LITTLE over a hundred years ago Emerson wrote in his journal, "Henceforth I design not to utter any speech, poem or book that is not entirely and peculiarly my own work." He had just settled in the little village of Concord, where he spent the remaining forty-eight years of his life, writing, speaking, but always thinking, thinking his own thoughts. "There is no event," he said, "but sprang somewhere from the soul of man; and therefore there is none but the soul of man can interpret." He delved deeply into his own soul, and thereby has become a priceless heritage not only to his countrymen, but also to the world.

If we look for a moment at the country and the village in which Emerson lived, we may the more easily interpret his message. When Emerson in 1838 wanted to express the geographical range of the country he said, from Bangor to Mobile. When President Jackson went calling in Washington he jumped ditches and climbed stiles. Even though New York had a population of two hundred thousand, pigs still rooted in the mud of Broadway. The population of Boston was not too large to hear the voice of a single orator. Chicago was made up of seventeen families. The United States as a whole contained just over thirteen million people, and of these less than one million lived in cities. The average American in 1837 was a small farmer who owned his farm.



Concord in 1837 was an old-fashioned, sleepy New England village. Its two hundred years of existence had been uneventful except for the skirmish of the farmers with the British army in 1775. A broad, long, rambling street, flanked by wooden houses set back among overshadowing trees, a lazy stream that scarcely could be said to flow, so slowly did the water move; shadowed graveyards, filled with moss-covered tombstones of colonists who had lived and died subjects of the English Crown—this was the village of Concord. "Everybody knew everybody and all about everybody," as Lowell said, and he thought he remembered that the women still washed clothes in the town spring in 1837, the year he spent there.

Concord was not a port, it had no commerce, no industry, no mark of commercial achievement, but it did contain interesting people. Emerson's next-door neighbor, George Minot, a descendant of an early Concord family, had only been the twenty miles to Boston once, when with the Concord militia he marched there in 1812, but he knew every field and stream of Concord by heart. Emerson loved and esteemed these Concord villagers and farmers. He often walked by the side of the philosophically inclined Edmund Hosmer, watching the way he handled his oxen and plowed-under his corn. He thought of Hosmer as a kind of Alexander the Great of the soil, conquering and ruling his fertile fields. Abel Moore, the fiddler-farmer, often took an hour of Emerson's time. Emerson listened to the drovers and teamsters in the village square, admiring their virile, active, salty speech. The men who built the bridges across the small streams impressed him. They knew their work. They were artists of toil. Squire Hoar and Sam Staples, the constable, who had been an auctioneer, barkeeper, real-estate agent and hostler, were friends of Emerson.

One day Mary Moody Emerson, Emerson's aunt, alighted from the stage in Concord. She saw a man hitching his horse and buggy in front of a store, approached him and told him that she wanted to use his conveyance while he was shopping. As he was mildly demurring, she climbed into the buggy, telling him that she was a fellow townsman of his by birth and that she wanted to visit Dr. Ripley. The astonished villager recovered his speech in time to tell her that she might be gone as long as

she liked. In those days there were no taxis, and local problems were solved in a neighborly way. Bronson Alcott, the father of Louisa May Alcott, refused to pay his taxes—one dollar and fifty cents—to a government that protected human slavery. When constable Sam Staples went to tell Alcott that he regretted that he would have to carry him off to jail, Alcott was overseeing his children's lessons. Alcott asked for a moment's time while Mrs. Alcott put some food in a basket. The prison fare was too rich for him. Basket on arm, Alcott accompanied Sam Staples slowly to the jail. The matron met them at the door of the jail to inform them that she was sorry, but Mr. Alcott's cell was not yet prepared for him. "Very well, Samuel," said Alcott, "I will go back and resume the children's lessons, and when you want me you can come for me." In the meantime Squire Hoar, who had sent the constable for Alcott, out of his own pocket paid the taxes with a splendid disregard for principle, and the case was declared settled. On another occasion Alcott, who had four young girls at home and who was temporarily without income went down the winding Concord road with a wheelbarrow, stopping at people's gardens along the way to gather a few vegetables. When a householder remonstrated with him, Alcott replied, "But I need them," and went on his way. Thus was the problem of relief solved in the neighborhood in which Emerson lived.

Emerson's fondness for these neighborly fellow-villagers of his was deep. He knew them as honest, reliable men and women. He understood their motives in living. They did not wish to "get," they wished to "have"; they did not wish to "do," they wished to "be." "In Concord here," Emerson wrote in his journal, "there is some milk of life. People go a-fishing and know the taste of their meat. They cut their own whippletree in the woodlot; they know something practically of the sun and the east wind, of the underpinning and the roofing of the house, and the pan and mixture of the soils."

In the summer of 1837 Emerson was invited to deliver the Harvard Phi Beta Kappa lecture. At that time he had no more than a local reputation. He had been a minister in Boston and had delivered a course or two of lectures there, but certainly no one foresaw the magnitude and far-reaching significance of that lecture, which has been echoing and reechoing around the world

for the hundred and more years since that historic August 31. In the preceding year Emerson had enunciated his ideas in a little book called *Nature*. It had contained the germ of most of what Emerson was to say during his many years of lecturing and writing, but few people had seen it, or heard of it. In fact only five hundred copies of the book sold in thirteen years. Five hundred copies of the Phi Beta Kappa address sold in one month. It was recognized at the time as a momentous utterance.

It took Emerson two hours for the eighteen-mile stage trip from Concord to Harvard Square, but the time did not languish for him. He took the trip in to Boston almost every Saturday to meet with his friends in the Transcendental Club or the Saturday Club, or to spend the day in Mrs. Peabody's Book Shop. And he enjoyed the passing association with people in the coach. He met there lawyers on their way to court, ministers, housewives, traders, ladies of fashion. Once a fellow wayfarer amused him greatly by saying: "Three things make the gentleman, the hat, the collar, and the boots."

Emerson went through the open countryside, with the dust of the fields on his shoulders, to tell that group of Harvard dignitaries, "Trust thyself." That was his message, the speech that many of his hearers called "Our Yankee version of a lecture by Abelard," and that Holmes, then a college student called "our intellectual Declaration of Independence." Trust thyself. That is the message that made Matthew Arnold call Emerson's *Essays* the greatest prose work written in English during the nineteenth century. Emerson had sought solitude and country life in order to work out his doctrine of living, and this was it. Trust thyself. If you believe that a popgun is a popgun, do not quit your belief though the ancient and honorable of the earth affirm it to be the crack of doom. If the single man plant himself indomitably on his instincts, and there abide, the huge world will come round to him. The world is his, who can see through its pretension. What deafness, what stone-blind custom, what overgrown error you behold, is there only by sufferance,—by your sufferance. See it to be a lie, and you have already dealt it its mortal blow. The day is always his, who works in it with serenity and great aims.

Trust thyself. That is the message that gives man his

rightful place in the world. If there be one lesson more than another, which should pierce his ear, it is, The world is nothing, the man is all. The individual is the unit of measurement in the universe. In yourself is the law of all nature. I believe (this is Emerson's thought in his own words) man has been wronged; he has wronged himself. Men in history, men in the world of today are bugs, are spawn, and are called "the mass" and "the herd." We have made the individual of no account. We have made him less than a man. Now we must restore him to his manhood.

This was the message of Emerson as he gave it to that Cambridge society a century ago. He was at the time thirty-four years old, "the quietest, plainest, unobtrusivest man possible." His tall, spare form was not one to attract attention, but he had an aura about him that was contagious. He had "a slow wise smile" and a serene presence of living power. His thought was noble and his presence convincing.

One might want to question this doctrine of self-reliance. Should a man trust himself when he is completely and irrevocably wrong? Before attempting to answer this question we must look again at Emerson's speech. Man is constantly in the presence of nature. Every day, the sun; and, after sunset, night and her stars. Ever the winds blow; ever the grass grows. What is nature? There is never a beginning, there is never an end, to the inexplicable continuity of this web of God, but always circular power returning into itself. Therein it resembles man's spirit, whose beginning, whose ending he never can find. Man studies nature that he may know himself. And he teaches himself from the mind of the past. He must know the minds of the greatest men of ages. Books are used to inspire man to find that which is highest within himself. The whole value of history, of biography, is to increase a man's self-trust, by demonstrating what man can be and do. The great books inspire man, but they must not confine him. They help him, as does nature, to know himself. But that is the final aim, he must know himself. For by knowing himself he knows all men. The deeper he dives into his privatest, secretest presentiment, to his wonder he finds, "this is the most acceptable, most public, and universally true. The better part of every man feels, this is myself. Here is the

doctrine which Emerson later amplified into the Over-Soul, the soul of God within the soul of every man. Thus when a man looks within himself he finds God, the Universal Soul. Should a man trust himself? Well, whom else should he trust, if not himself? Self-reliance is now seen as God-reliance, the reliance of man upon the divine within him.

Emerson's lecture came at a time when all New England was waiting for some great message. The ground was prepared, it only needed someone to sow the seed. In Emerson converged the great thought of the world and he, with his creative originality, built his thought. He brought his thought for his own time. He said, "The old artist said, 'I paint for eternity.' This eternity for which I paint is not in past or future, but is the height of every living hour." There were serious problems in Emerson's day, as there are in ours, and his thought helped meet them. In all my lectures, he said, I have taught one doctrine, namely, the infinitude of the private man. Does human slavery seem compatible with the infinitude of the private man? When the Fugitive Slave Law was passed, Emerson wrote in his journal, "This filthy enactment was made in the nineteenth century, by people who could read and write. I will not obey it, by God." Should a man relinquish his conscience to the legislators? Alcott was ready to go to jail before he would pay a dollar and a half to a slave-protecting government. Henry David Thoreau spent the night in jail for the sake of his conscience, and satirically asked, "Is this the best use a government can find for me, to be in jail?"

Emerson's personality definitely entered into his teaching. He had the air of a prophet and the unobtrusive mildness of the least of men. He lectured over America, attracting the educated and the unlearned, inspiring them and enriching their lives. Moncure Conway thought the greatest day of his life the one day he spent with Emerson. A scrub lady one afternoon approached her mistress, asking if she could leave early, to hear Mr. Emerson lecture. The mistress asked her if she understood Emerson. "No, I don't," she replied, "but I like to see him stand up there and talk as though he weren't a bit better than anybody else." That, we might say, comes close to the core of Emerson. He was not a bit better than anybody else. The

infinitude of the private man was his message and it carried out over the world Walt Whitman carried it when he said, "The greatest city is the city having the greatest men and women." The individual counts, not the number of the individuals. Emerson brought men to themselves. He created independence. He was, to use the words of Arnold, the great friend and aider of those who would live in the spirit.

The New World of our forefathers, the new society which they were creating, was an innovation in world history.

"We have," wrote Crèvecoeur, "no princes for which we toil and starve: we are the most perfect society now existing in the world."

It is obvious to everyone that this "most perfect society" of Crèvecoeur's has been completely changed from the agricultural society he admired. In Emerson's day the forces were well under way which were industrialising America. James Russell Lowell said, "I have watched the change (to me a sad one) from an agricultural to a proletary population." In Crèvecoeur's day each person worked for himself; in Emerson's day most people worked for themselves; in our day most people work for an employer. In Cambridge, Massachusetts, where Emerson delivered his address a century ago to a community of free-holders, today there are tens of thousands of wage-earners.

What place, we might ask, does Emerson's doctrine of self-reliance have in the lives of a nation of wage-earners? Further, we must remind ourselves that in Emerson's day the state was a very loose organization, while for the past fifty years or more the totalitarian doctrine of the state has been gradually gaining headway. One hundred years ago the state encroached upon the individual but slightly and infrequently. Now the state asserts its rights to regulate and control. Lowell could thunder out, in the midst of the Mexican War, "Ez fer war, I call it murder," and remain a respected member of the community. In World Wars I and II, Lowell's *Biglow Papers* or Thoreau's essay on *Civil Disobedience* would have been considered treasonous, and the men would have been dealt with as traitors. The complexion of our whole economic and political life has changed in the past century. Has Emerson's doctrine any validity today?

To answer this question we must look into Emerson's

teaching once more. Emerson said, "In all my lectures I have taught one doctrine, namely, the infinitude of the private man." When a man looks deep within his own heart he still finds there the Universal spirit. Whether a man work for someone else, or whether he manage in some way to preserve his economic independence is secondary in importance to the question of whether he is an individual, a private man, enjoying the status of one who governs his own life. No one can give you peace but yourself, Emerson said, and there is an immense significance in those words. Things are in the saddle and ride mankind, he said, again. Why should man be in bondage to things, to the paraphernalia of our complicated modern life? "Every day, the sun; and, after the sunset, night and her stars. Ever the winds blow; ever the grass grows." And in the midst of this serene spectacle, God. But we lose ourselves in possessions, things.

Emerson's influence on the modern world has been great and far-reaching. He left his imprint in some way upon such diverse men as Gandhi and Nietzsche, Whitman and Tagore, Carlyle and Kagawa. His words have been a vitalizing influence on the plains of Siberia and the islands of the South Seas. Although his first book sold but five hundred copies in thirteen years, his influence has been spreading out over the earth like the concentric circles of a pool of water.

It was more than a coincidence that the first State Board of Education in the United States was established in the year of Emerson's Phi Beta Kappa address, by the husband of a good friend of Emerson. John Sullivan Dwight said that Emerson braced people's minds and procured an audience for every kind of art, that in Boston the interest in Beethoven began at the same time as the interest in Emerson. Music was introduced into the public school curriculum in Boston in 1838, the first time in any American public school system. Interest in symphonic music, and the classical arts generally, followed Emerson's lecture tours over the United States.

He has been at the same time the most liberalizing and the most civilizing force in American thought. His spirit and his teachings have worked to free man, the private man, from the shackles of mere convention, mere custom, mere tradition. It is

easy, he said, to see that a greater self-reliance must work a revolution in all offices and relations of men; in their religion; in their education; in their pursuits, their modes of living, their association; in their property, in their speculative views. When custom and convention conspire with society to make us robots, we must look to ourselves and trust ourselves. Emerson has given dignity and assurance to the spirit of man.

If we translate Emerson's doctrine into terms of our present day problems, it means an invulnerable faith in democracy, in the spirit of America, in the undistinguished masses, to meet the problems of the age. It means that we, all of us, can be trusted to learn to use for ourselves the leisure and the artistic vistas which the machine age has opened for us. We shall, by reaching into the depths of the empire of the spirit to which we all belong, bring forth an ever increasing fund of creative, appreciative, and intellectual force which will enrich the common heritage of mankind. Trust yourself, your deepest, sincerest self, and have no fears for the future.



# *The Asia in Emerson's Mind*

THE United States in the 1830's and 1840's after a generation of friendly and extended trade relations with the Orient, gradually became aware of the intellectual, spiritual, and literary values of the ancient cultures of Asia. Ralph Waldo Emerson, a young minister, lecturer, and thinker, who was settling in the 1830's in Concord, Massachusetts, to devote himself to a life as 'man-thinking,' is probably the most important American illustrating that impact.

Just before Emerson became thirty years old, he wrote out and dated an emphatic pronouncement: "Henceforth, please God, forever I forego the yoke of men's opinions." Looked at from a narrow view, this seems to be a declaration of isolation from man—from man's wisdom, man's literature, man's culture, man's social, religious and political practices. But on the contrary, this struggling to get free from "the yoke of men's opinions" left Emerson free to roam the world in search of usable intellectual fodder. He never wavered from a willingness to receive wisdom and light—or even a suggestion for the felicitous phrasing of a thought.

He continued his notation of his personal quest:

I will be  
Light-hearted as a bird, and live with God.  
I find him in the bottom of my heart,  
I hear continually his voice therein.

Here is the basis for his independence as a thinker and also for his free borrowing. He was an honest seeker, looking within his own experience and to the distilled experience of the wise men of the past. He was both an original thinker and a tireless eclectic. And he was looking for the great common denominator of man's spiritual nature.

That attitude sent him to the literature of the East. He began making an acquaintance with the names of Eastern books while still in his teens—though at that time the literature of Asia was inaccessible to Americans excepting in the barest fragments. Even before he read the books of Asia, Emerson was finding and forming an Asia in his mind.

He believed that books should be used to awaken. Man should not be a bookworm, swallowing books, growing up in a library, believing it his duty to accept Cicero or Plato or Confucius. "I had better never see a book," he said, "than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system." No, books are for nothing but to inspire. Hence, although Emerson was greatly influenced by the writings of the Orient, he never set out to absorb or to master as a system Oriental thought

Possibly his attitude towards the profundities of the ancient Eastern cultures can best be seen through a brief passage from a letter he wrote in 1840. He had been reading, he says, the Vedas.

It is sublime as heat and night and a breathless ocean. It contains every religious sentiment, all the grand ethics which visit in turn each noble and poetic mind, and nothing is easier than to separate what must have been the primeval inspiration from the endless ceremonial nonsense which caricatures and contradicts it through every chapter. It is of no use to put away the book: if I trust myself in the woods or in a boat upon the pond, nature makes a Brahmin of me presently: eternal necessity, eternal compensation, unfathomable power, unbroken silence,—this is her creed

Here we see the reverent irreverence of Emerson's approach to the world scriptures. He would separate the sense from the non-sense. He would test in the crucible of his own experience. And he would meditate in relaxed absorption before the sublimity of understanding and beauty. "The day of days, the great

day of the feast of life," he wrote, "is that in which the inward eye opens to the Unity in things. ."

Emerson, like most great prophets and teachers, was inclined toward an occasional use of the superlative generalization. In one passage in his *Journal* he wrote: "Then I discovered the Secret of the World; that all things subsist, and do not die, but only retire a little from sight and afterwards return again." In many different ways, Emerson was bound up with this idea of the eternal flux and flow, the indestructibility of matter or energy, the transmigration of spirit, the fundamental oneness of the Oversoul, the idea of one Deity, in which all things are absorbed. "The raptures of prayer and ecstasy of devotion lose all being in one Being. This tendency finds its highest expression in the religious writings of the East, and chiefly in the Indian Scriptures, in the Vedas, the Bhagavat Geeta and the Vishnu Purana." Thus for his understanding of the "Secret of the World" Emerson drew on Oriental wisdom. It seemed to him that "the Zoroastrian, the Indian, the Persian scriptures are majestic, and more to our daily purpose than this year's almanac or this day's newspaper."

This idea of centripetence, which is frequently recurring in Emerson, in such essays as "Compensation," "Illusions"—probably his most Oriental essay—, and "Oversoul," was expressed in its most puzzling form—puzzling, that is, to Emerson's New England neighbors and to readers of the *Atlantic Monthly*—in the poem "Brahma." This short poem is a kind of quintessence of Emerson's Asian understanding. As the poem has been widely read it has taken many readers (though with a certain degree of mystery) toward Oriental thought. Mark Twain, in his speech at the Whittier birthday celebration in 1877, took this poem by Emerson as a basis for parody and buffoonery, when he had the card-playing tramp named Emerson say,

I am the doubter and the doubt. . . .

as he calmly bunched the cards and continued a new deal, still parodying,

They reckon ill who leave me out;  
They know not well the subtle ways I keep.  
I pass and deal again!

One who knows the background of Oriental thought should

realize that for the Occidental who, without preparation, comes upon such a poem as Emerson's, the result may be explosive incredulity, profanity or awed mystery.

### BRAHMA

If the red slayer think he slays,  
                   or if the slain think he is slain,  
 They know not well the subtle ways  
                   I keep, and pass, and turn again.  
 Far or forgot to me is near;  
                   Shadow and sunlight are the same;  
 The vanished gods to me appear;  
                   And one to me are shame and fame.  
 They reckon ill who leave me out,  
                   When me they fly, I am the wings;  
 I am the doubter and the doubt,  
                   And I the hymn the Brahmin sings.  
 The strong gods pine for my abode,  
                   And pine in vain the sacred Seven;  
 But thou, meek lover of the good!  
                   Find me, and turn thy back on heaven.

How closely Emerson used some sources has been pointed out by several scholars. The *Katha Upanishads*, for instance, has a passage which Emerson saw. "If the slayer thinks I slay, if the slain thinks I am slain, then both of them do not know well. (The soul) does not slay, nor is it slain." The ending of the poem may have this word of explanation: until the world of Brahma is reached, all life is poured back into life; but when the high-souled ones achieve the world of Brahma, there is no birth again.

"Hamatreya," too, is related to Oriental thought, made up as it is of the names of Emerson's sturdy New England neighbors, their sayings, and their procedure. Emerson sees each farmer as walking proudly over his land, saying, "This is mine." But the earth knows differently.

Earth laughs in flowers, to see her boastful boys  
                   Earth-proud, proud of the earth which is not theirs;  
 Who steer the plough, but cannot steer their feet  
                   Clear of the grave.

Where are these earth-proud men? Their lawyer's deeds were sure and they were proud and solid men. But now are they all

swept away, each added to his land, "a lump of mould the more."

The doctrine of fate is one of the points where Emerson's relationship to the Oriental thought shows with greatest impact. Here is both the similarity in the direction of Emerson's thought to the vast bulk of Eastern fatalism, and a decided difference in application and conclusion which is emphasized throughout Emerson's *Journal* and essays. The question of fate is a perennial one. If the fathers have eaten sour grapes, shall the children's teeth be set on edge?

The *Koran* says, "To all men is their day of death appointed, and they cannot postpone or advance it one hour." The Hindu theory centered in transmigration; "Fate is nothing but the deeds committed in a prior state of existence." Here we have a difference in the Orient between the Mohammedan and the Hindu. The Hindu scriptures assert that all that man suffers or enjoys is the harvest of his own actions from previous existences. Sin leads to sufferings. No one inherits the good or evil deeds of another. This law, Emerson saw as the basis of the human mind: "out there in nature we see its fatal strength."

But here Emerson parted with the Oriental resignation to fate, the quietism of the religions of the East. "Thy lot or portion of life is seeking after thee; therefore be at rest from seeking after it," says Caliph Ali; while the Hindu resigns himself to the "dread reality, the abysmal Force." Against this submission Emerson found another "secret of the world": "Person makes event, and event person."

Fate is immense, says Emerson in his fine essay, "Fate," but to look only or principally at fate is to falsify the world. Power is also a fact to be dealt with, and Power is lord over Fate. Man's sound relation is to use and command, and not to cringe before the seeming immensity of fatalism. "They who talk much of destiny, their birth-star, etc., are in a lower dangerous plane, and invite the evils they fear." Man can learn to use and command instead of being swept by the forces of the world. Those very forces are convertible by intellect. The water may drown ship and sailors: or, if the sailors learn to swim, if the ship is trimmed and ready, sailors and ship may cleave the waves and use the forces of wind and water to carry man's useful products.

Emerson sharpened his mind and deepened his convictions on Oriental thought. He was strongly attracted by what may better be called the spirit than the thought of the Orient. He used the poetry of Persia, especially Hafiz and Saadi. He returned over and over to Confucius and Lao-Tze. He quoted with delight the remark of Confucius to the governor who had complained of thieves, "If you, sir, were not covetous . . . they would not steal." Emerson was one of the great men of the West in the nineteenth century who was big enough to try to understand the *whole* world, to see into its *oneness*.

One Indian scholar, Mozoomdar, has written that "the character of Emerson shines upon India serene as the evening star. He seems to some of us to have been a geographical mistake. He ought to have been born in India." But this is not to see Emerson whole. Emerson was as much Yankee as he was mystic prophet or seer. In a way Asia means the Illimitable, while Europe (the Occident) asserts, "Yet things are knowable."

Emerson, though always attracted by the illimitable, still, in the final analysis, always placed himself on the side of the knowable and the practical. He quoted Caliph Ali, "If knowledge calleth unto practice, well; if not, it goeth away." It is still often said that the strength of the East is inertia, that the masses have the strength of sitting still. That is not the Occidental way. Emerson essentially expressed the West in the sentence, "The true romance which the world exists to realize will be the transformation of genius into practical power."

Emerson came at a momentous time in world history, when the East and the West were awakening to a realization that each needed the other, when the old nations of the Orient were opening their doors to commerce in materials of usefulness and beauty and to the intercommunication of intellect and spirit. Emerson was one of the first Americans to venture into the literature of Asia and absorb it sufficiently to be an early interpreter.

# *Hitch Your Wagon to a Star*

**H**ITCH your wagon to a star? How often this quotation is used. We hear it at school commencements and in assembly and chapel addresses. Fathers use it in admonishing their sons. "Hitch your wagon to a star," they say. "Be somebody." This is the advice of the wise and the aged to the young and the inexperienced.

What does it mean—this hitching a wagon to a star? How do the people who give such advice mean it to be interpreted? How do those who hear it apply it to themselves? Does it mean, "Set your goal higher?" Does it mean, "Strive for the unattainable?" Does it mean, "Work toward the impossible, even though you know it is the impossible?"

In our time an incalculable number of young men throughout the world are given instruction in gunnery. They learn to aim guns with the intention of hitting certain targets. They are not taught to aim high, but rather, considering the various physical forces and changing factors, to aim at what they wish to hit. In gunnery classes one does not give the advice, aim high.

In matters of personal ambition it is probably desirable to set one's goal high—at least fairly high. We Americans probably tell too many cherub-faced, blue-eyed boys of six to study hard and they may grow up to be President some day. We

have too many stage-struck youths dreaming of stardom in the movies or on Broadway. The beginning writer would do better to forget that he is working to rival Shakespeare or Margaret Mitchell. He has a craftsmanship to learn. He had better be at learning it. More people are spoiled for good, honest, well-adjusted lives in the field of activity best adapted to their tastes and capacities by setting for themselves goals too remote and extravagant, than by failing to strive for goals high enough.

It is certainly true also, that people by and large, fail in making the most that they could of their lives. They fall short of completion in intellectual powers, in practical achievement, in social responsibility. But will telling people to hitch their wagons to the stars help them more adequately to achieve those desired goals of realizing much greater potentiality than they do ordinarily achieve?

Yes, if—and only if—the meaning of that cryptic statement is made adequately clear. Emerson did not mean to be puzzling or enigmatic in his use of the sentence—and it does come from the work of that famous wise man of Concord. He so buttressed it around with explanation and illustration that its meaning was both very clear and very helpful. It is, as Emerson used it, a noble idea, an inspiring application of truth. But we have long since pulled it entirely from Emerson's context.

Emerson used this sentence, Hitch your wagon to a star, seventy-five years ago. He was at the time sixty-seven years old, the much-loved, widely known and revered sage of Concord. His books were never best sellers. But *Society and Solitude*, in which this famous sentence appeared, did receive favorable attention from the serious readers of the day. "Hitch your wagon to a star" appears in the middle of a paragraph, toward the end of the second essay in the volume and it did attract attention. Oliver Wendell Holmes said it should be printed in large gold letters. It has been. It has been embossed on motto boards and embroidered in silk. That, essentially, is what is wrong. Emerson knew he had a striking sentence. He knew, too, that it needed a context. It needed to be explained. The idea of this sentence fits into the essay "Civilization."

When man has developed from being a dweller in caves or in trees—one cannot say for sure to what extent—then his



state of society is called civilization. A people without clothing, without iron, without alphabet, without marriage—is without civilization. Development is not a steady growth. It comes by jumps and starts, great rushes of understanding coming suddenly from some simple unpredictable incident.

“Thus,” says Emerson, “the effect of a frame or stone house is immense on the tranquillity, power and refinement of the builder. A man in a cave or in a camp, a nomad, will die with no more estate than the wolf or the horse leaves. But by so simple a labor as a house being achieved, his chief enemies are kept at bay. He is safe from the teeth of wild animals, from frost, sunstroke and weather, and fine faculties begin to yield their fine harvest. Invention and art are born, manners and social beauty and delight. ’Tis wonderful how soon a piano gets into a log hut on the frontier.”

One mark of civilization is the diffusion of knowledge, passing it over all artificial barriers of caste or group. The ship at sea offers a striking example of man’s development. Whether a dug-out or a sailing vessel, or a diesel-driven ship of today, still a ship finding its way over the water marks man’s permanent achievement. Man has learned to use powers not his own. The wind in the sails works for him. He figures his location by sun, by moon, by stars. No familiarity of usage, no frequency of occurrence “can lessen the wonder of this control by so weak a creature of forces so prodigious.”

Now we must follow Emerson’s thought one step further to get the depth of his meaning. Civilization is not man controlling and changing nature. Nor is it man being controlled and warped out of shape by natural forces. It is, rather, man’s learning to put himself in alliance with nature. Hitch your wagon to a star. Tie your ships to the power of the winds. Put yourself in alliance with the great sources of exhaustless and limitless power. There is the capacity to make civilization.

“We had,” says Emerson, “letters to send: couriers could not go fast enough nor far enough. . . . But we found out that the air and earth were full of electricity, and always going our way,—just the way we wanted to send. Would he take a message?” That question was answered when man met the conditions of nature. Electricity works for us when we work with it.

"Now that is the wisdom of a man, in every instance of his labor, to hitch his wagon to a star, and see his chore done by the gods themselves. That is the way we are strong, by borrowing the might of the elements. The forces of steam, gravity, galvanism, light, magnets, wind, fire, serve us day by day and cost us nothing "

In Emerson's thought is also the idea that man may more fully and completely find his goals in life and may more adequately work toward them if he learns the great discipline embodied in the very act of hitching his wagons to the stars. the universe is stable and dependable—if, and only if, we work with it.

The more we permit the power of the elements to give stability to our physical lives, the more we borrow from the stable and inflexible elements for our achievements, the more abiding principles will come to determine our social and political actions. When man steps aside from devoting all his strength to wood sawing—and permits the star to saw it—he comes to see himself more clearly in relationship to the whole. For man is not an isolated unit. He too in himself has sources of power and means of getting greater capacities.

"In all my lectures", wrote Emerson in his Journal thirty years before he wrote his *Society and Solitude*, "I have taught one doctrine, namely, the infinitude of the private man." He never saw the necessity for changing that emphasis. No man can violate his own nature, but few of us develop or discover what our own nature is. Man can, and must learn, study, explore—himself and the world around him. He has sources of power which he knows not of.

Here are Emerson's words: "Hitch your wagon to a star. Let us not lag in paltry works which serve our pot and bag alone. Let us not lie and steal. No god will help. We shall find all their teams going the other way,—Charles' Wain, Great Bear, Orion, Leo, Hercules: every god will leave us. Work rather for those interests which the divinities honor and promote,—justice, and love, freedom, knowledge, utility."

Thus when we are going in the right direction we can hitch-hike a ride in Olympian chariots. But to do so our works must lie in the paths of celestial circuits. And civilization is not

finally in the real measure of achievement evaluated by the number of saws sawing wood on the energy of the tides, nor by the explosive power of its various engines of destruction, nor by the controlled application of gravitation in the erection of bridges, skyscrapers, and harvesting equipment.

How many people follow the admonition to hitch their wagons to the stars? How many of them are allies with principle and law in life? How many of them so direct their lives as to give stability and order on the cosmic scale? The kind of man a country turns out is the test of a civilization. It is not New York streets or lines of steel which mark the true value but the moral and intellectual steps. There must be the highest regard for the welfare of all, for their personal liberty and justice. "Only that state," says Emerson, "can live in which injury to the least member is recognized as damage to the whole."

Hitch your wagon to a star does mean that one should aim high. At least in the sense that he should endeavor with all his might to understand his world and put himself in accord with it, not in a physical sense only, but also in the profoundest religious and philosophical sense. Emerson would never have looked with favor upon anyone's use of this great figure of speech of his to stir the personal ambitions of a group of graduating high school seniors toward seeking more remunerative jobs. But, alas, how low our civilization sometimes sinks!

## Emerson's "Days"

*Daughters of Time, the hypocritic Days,  
Muffled and dumb like barefoot dervishes,  
And marching single in an endless file,  
Bring diadems and fagots in their hands  
To each they offer gifts after his will.  
Bread, kingdoms, stars, and sky that holds them all.  
I, in my pleached garden, watched the pomp,  
Forgot my morning wishes, hastily  
Took a few herbs and apples, and the Day  
Turned and departed silent I, too late,  
Under her solemn fillet saw the scorn.*

EMERSON wrote this poem in 1851, when he was forty-eight years old. It was first published in the beginning number of the *Atlantic Monthly*, in 1857. There is agreement among readers of Emerson and the critics that this is his best poem. Emerson himself believed it to be his best.

The figure of the poem, the image, is simple; yet it is appealing to the imagination. It is suitable to carry the basic thought of the poem, and at the same time it yields itself admirably to Emerson's quality of unpretentious decoration. The days bring diadems. To each they offer gifts. I watched, forgot my wishes, took a few herbs. The day departed. Too late I saw her scorn. The one concept, the symbol of day as a gift-bearing maiden from whom each person receives what he is willing to take, is consistently maintained throughout. It is applicable to the idea with no extraneous bits of unassimilated matter.

Emerson grasped the symbolic quality of life and the world. "Things," he wrote, "admit of being used as symbols, because nature is a symbol, in the whole, and in every part." The poet has the function of grasping in one instantaneous whole the meaning of a symbol at the same time giving it form which may yield itself to expression and communication. But one must not think of the poet as being different in kind, in quality, from other persons. He may possibly differ in degree, but in every man lurks the latent poet. At least, Emerson believed "every man is so far a poet as to be susceptible to the enchantments of nature; for all men have the thoughts whercof the universe is the celebration." Hunters, farmers, butchers, grooms, may not give that final expression in language to their symbolic apprehensions of thought, but they have the untransmuted materials of the poem in their lives each day. They are not attracted by the superficial. The man close to nature has a sympathetic grasp of the living power which he feels to be present all around him. No imitation contents him. "He loves the earnest of the north wind, of rain, of stone, and wood, and iron. A beauty not explicable is dearer than a beauty which we can see to the end of. It is nature the symbol, nature certifying the supernatural, body overflowed by life which he worships with coarse but sincere rites."

Emerson was constantly thinking of the symbolic nature of language. how *right* means *straight*, *wrong* means *twisted*, *supercilious* means *the raising of the eyebrow*. "Every object rightly seen unlocks a new faculty of the soul." Living with such an understanding provides everywhere a daily adventure. Though the secret of the world is profound, anywhere one may find interpreters of its mystery. A mountain ramble, a new style of face, a new person, may be the key.

In the "Days" Emerson brought together the factors which he saw as the elements of poetry. He had a symbol which carried its own imaginative fascination. But properly apprehended it also carried the application of an idea which penetrates toward the mystery of life. The poem is compact, richly worded, genuine, not a decorated bit of tinsel. No wonder it pleased Emerson, and has pleased discriminating readers for almost a century.

The poem as a poem came into Emerson's mind so completely formed—as he thought a poem should—that afterwards he had no recollection of having worked on it. He wrote in his journal of having a poem “which I do not remember the composition or correction of, and could not write the like today, and have only, for proof of their [the lines] being mine, various external evidences, as the manuscripts in which I find them, and the circumstance that I have sent copies of them to friends, etc.”

It may be that the poem on a particular occasion grew in Emerson's mind to ripeness and expressed itself, but it is so completely his that he had been maturing this very idea in his mind for a quarter of a century. When in his garden with its interlaced branches—or wherever he in fact gave birth to the poem—he set down the words, he was bringing to fruition a long-developing, slow-growing harvest. The elements of this poem are so much a part of his life that he had been working with them since his college days and he continued to use them all his writing life.

We learn nothing rightly, he once had said, until we learn the symbolical character of life. Day creeps after day, each full of facts, dull, strange, despised things. Then presently the aroused intellect finds gold and gems in one of these scorned facts,—finds that the day was really presenting a rock of diamonds, that a fact is an Epiphany of God. Emerson was groping, in prosaic form, toward the poem which he was later to find. Twenty years before the poem came, he was on the trail of it. He wrote in his journal,

The days pass over me  
And I am still the same.

That was in 1831. In 1840 he wrote Margaret Fuller a letter in which he used the same basic figure—with an important addition: “Heaven walks among us ordinarily muffled in such triple or tenfold disguises that the wisest are deceived and no one suspects the days to be gods.” Six years later, in another letter, he used a similar kind of language: “But though days go smoothly enough they do not bring me in their fine timely wallets the alms I incessantly beg of them.”

We see that years before the “Days” was written, Emerson

had worked over in his mind all the elements of the poem. In his essay, "The Poet," he had asserted with the kind of finality of statement which he sometimes used that "poetry was all written before time was." When we write poems we are but gropingly working toward an expression of the already abiding and eternal. The final prose reaching toward this poetic expression of "Days" came four years before the poem. The sentence is a good paraphrase of the not-yet-written poem: "The days come and go like muffled and veiled figures sent from a distant friendly party, but they say nothing, and if we do not use the gifts they bring, they carry them as silently away."

But all these half-expressions fall short of reaching the finality of wording and form into which "Days" falls. In this little poem of but seventy-nine words, as natural and free in expression as it is stately and dignified, Emerson brought together into sharp focus the crux of the problem of his life. In the real meaning of the word, it may with justice be called America's most philosophical poem. Here we have pictured in one brief flash of imaginative insight the drama of life's eternally reenacted dilemma. Life offers so much, and we take so little!

We take so little not just because of inertia, laziness, confusion. We are presented with the multiple complexities of nature, so much of which at any one time is beyond the range of our ability to experience or understand. To the child, joyous in absorbing a flicker of sunlight or a colored balloon, the world of beauty beyond that moment is ungraspable. The child does not find the exhilaration in a Browning monologue, a Beethoven concerto, that he does in a colored stone. He must spend some time in learning to live. Ah, he thinks, too much! "We are always getting ready to live," complained Emerson, "but never living"; and that complaint has been echoed at some time in his youth by nearly every man of developed experience. If one prepares for life—life is slipping away. If one does not prepare for it—it evaporates. The child enjoys his colored stone: so does the great scientist Humboldt. But much preparation lies between the child's crowings of delight over his common plaything and Humboldt's *Cosmos*.

Emerson's fellow townsman and good friend, Henry Thoreau,

went to live in his cabin by Walden Pond to solve for himself this paradox of life. Can we live while we are enlarging the scope of our lives? Can we appreciate the vastness of life's offerings and discriminate so that we use only what is becoming to us?

Thoreau was thinking over the meaning of life's constantly changing and colorful panorama in the quietness of his forest cabin. "Every morning was a cheerful invitation to make my life of equal simplicity, and I may say innocence, with Nature herself....I got up early and bathed in the pond....Mornings bring back the heroic ages. I was as much affected by the faint hum of a mosquito making its invisible and unimaginable tour through my apartment at earliest dawn when I was sitting with doors and windows open, as I could be by any trumpet that ever sang of fame." This kind of morning experience is a call to the everlasting vigor and fertility of the world. The morning hour is the day's most memorable season. Thoreau is forceful and emphatic in his call to us to awake and realize the day. "That man who does not believe that each day contains an earlier, more sacred, and auroral hour than he has yet profaned, has despaired of life, and is pursuing a descending and darkening way....Morning is when I am awake and there is a dawn in me. . .The millions are awake enough for physical labor; but only one in a million is awake enough for effective intellectual exertion, only one in a hundred millions to a poetic or divine life. To be awake is to be alive. I have never yet met a man who was quite awake. How could I have looked him in the face?"

Thoreau lived in the Emerson household for several years while Emerson's poem was undergoing its period of growth, and he often is plainer and more direct than Emerson in his expression of the thought common to both. These two Concord wise men could be satisfied with no less than that ultimate achievement—to which they, in common with other men, fell short.

Emerson, years after he wrote his poem, turned again to the same thought in the essay, "Works and Days". In our age of tools we accomplish many wonders, he wrote. We ride fast. We travel, grind, weave, forge, plant, till and excavate better than our forefathers did. Man has pride in his achievements.



Things begin to obey him. "We are to have the balloon yet, and the next war will be fought in the air. We may yet find a rosewater"—these are Emerson's words—"that will wash the negro white." Emerson continues in his vein of gently satirical humor. Tantalus, that old Greek who was vainly trying to reach the ever-receding waters, has lately been in Paris, in New York, in Boston. He is now in great spirits. He thinks he shall yet bottle the wave and have water at his command. But with all our tools things do not seem to go right. We are always in a crisis, always on the brink of chaos. Can anybody remember when sensible men, and the right sort of men, and the right sort of women, were plentiful?

Many factors, Emerson observed, concur to show us that we must look deeper for our salvation than to steam, photographs, balloons. Tools may even be dangerous. A man builds a fine house, and now he has a master, and a task for life he is to furnish, watch, show it, and keep it in repair, the rest of his days. But such a man is a pauper still. He only is rich who owns the day. The days are ever divine. They come and go like muffled and veiled figures.

This figure was central in Emerson's thinking. Life, he insisted, is what we do with the time at our disposal. We face the daily urgings of illusions, all competing for our attention, gaudy and colorful. But thus we are deceived and mislead. The old folk myths have truth in them still. The gods come to visit man in low disguises. It is the pretenders who deck themselves in jewels and ermine. Odin, in the Norse legends, dwelt in a fisherman's hut. Apollo dwelt with the shepherds of Admetus. Jesus, too, was born in a stable and sought companionship among fishermen and common folk. It is a very principle of science that nature shows herself best in leasts. And each after its kind uses its experiences. A serpent converts its meadow prey into the stuff of serpents. Peter and John are working up all existence into Peter and John.

"A poor Indian chief of the Six Nations of New York made a wiser reply than any philosopher, to some one complaining that he had not enough time. 'Well,' said Red Jacket, 'I suppose you have all there is.' " Thus the days, muffled and dumb, serve all equally, offering their wares.

"Days" brings together into its most compact form the weight of Emerson's teaching; yet it is not, by any means, all of Emerson. Here in a poem he took hold of his truth, but no one vessel can catch all of the infinite. Behind the high call to man as he is urged to seek the genuine values of life lies the paradox that what he does accept is genuine too, if in his wisdom and understanding he makes it so. Could Emerson be suggesting that the herbs and apples hastily taken are but empty baubles? If so, he is changing the symbols he is always using in his poems and essays.

Even with his Puritan background and his thorough acceptance of the tragedy of waste in human life, he could accept no doctrine calling man to a steady grind of work. The diadems, fagots, bread, kingdom, stars offered to each cannot be a serious life of toil. Emerson did not easily learn to play, but in theory at least he built his ideas of life's values on the directness of human experience. The violet by a mossy stone for him as for Wordsworth was an experience of life's richness. Why, then, the scorn? The lack is in the application, the realization, of the experience. The two words, *forgot* my morning wishes, and *hastily*, point out the weakness of the day's experience. Thoreau thought that only a few poetic divine men were awake to the new day. Emerson, too. The poet has a *whole new experience* (each word needs complete emphasis) to unfold. Each man needs the constant accession and stimulation of the *wholeness* of experience. In haste and forgetfulness we waste our opportunities for that enrichment of our lives. The day, under her solemn fillet, smiles her scornful smile.

The kind of experience we need—and miss—is that which finds expression in "Each and All".

I inhaled the violet's breath;  
Around me stood the oaks and firs, ..  
Beauty through my senses stole,  
I yielded myself to the perfect whole.

That is the poetic achievement of the "Days": Emerson yielded himself to the perfect whole. The poem in itself is an artistic achievement, a gem of rare beauty. Seen against the background of Emerson's groping toward it and his final achievement of his experience, it takes on an added luster. Few poems equal it in simple, compact beauty.

# *Emerson's Almost Perfect Orator: Edward Taylor*

*"... so much love poured out through so much imagination..."*

**A** WONDERFUL MAN; I had almost said, a perfect orator."

Emerson wrote these words in his journal concerning the Rev. Edward Taylor, the Methodist minister to the Seaman's Bethel Chapel in Boston. Taylor was a man to notice when he spoke and Emerson was a careful observer and analyst of the art of speaking. Hence in the juxtaposition of Taylor, the eloquent "natural" speaker, and Emerson, the practitioner of conversation and public oral communication to a superlative degree himself but even more a student of the creative art of speech in all its communicative aspects, we have an opportunity to study the performer and the critic, the doer and the evaluator.

Emerson's enthusiastic endorsement was called forth by Taylor's lecture on Temperance in the old Concord church, March 13, 1837, the same year in which Emerson himself made his greatest public address. The two men were not new to one another, for their acquaintance was then five years old, and it was to continue for thirty-five more, until the death of the spectacular minister of the Seaman's Bethel in 1871.

Temperance may not be the best subject on which to demonstrate forensic skill, and, moreover, Father Taylor (as he was widely known along the seacoast) was away from his normal sea setting and his favorite sea audience. But he had a capacity

for platform communication which made his every appearance memorable.

Emerson's journal note on the occasion of this lecture uses a series of explosive exclamations: "...what splendor! what sweetness! what richness! what depth! what cheer! How he conciliates, how he humanizes! how he exhilarates and ennobles! Beautiful philanthropist! Godly poet! the Shakespeare of the sailor and the poor. God has found one harp of divine melody to ring and sigh sweet music amidst caves and cellars." On examination, most of these exclamations will fit into a more prosy observation that Taylor brought the aliveness of his personality and imagination into harmonious relationship with his audience.

Taylor was without doubt one of the great and effective pulpit speakers of his generation, which was a generation of great pulpit oratory. He attracted the unlearned and the learned, the prominent and the unskilled toilers of the earth and the sea. Not only Emerson, but also Webster, Dr. Channing, Charles Dickens, Harriet Martineau, and the great ebb and flow of mankind heard him gladly.

He made no great speeches but he was a great speaker. He lacked education but he was a great man. He wrote nothing. He probably would have been incapable of writing. But speech was his element. His mind was active and sensitive to his hearers; but even more his spirit and his great sympathy for mankind were never dead. He lifted, he enlightened and enlivened whatever subject he touched. Speech was for him no dead medium, but a living, flowing, cascading flood of meaning.

The man and his speech were one. How paltry it is to say merely that the man was sincere. He and his speech were as wedded as the sun and its light.

Orphaned and homeless he went to sea as a cabin boy at the age of seven. He grew robust and broad-shouldered on his element, the sea. At seventeen he was stirred by a Methodist preacher to the active outpouring life of a Christian. He was imprisoned by the British during the War of 1812, and on the request of the prisoners he served them as an informal chaplain. Illiterate but filled with an intensely active spiritual life, he

learned to read after the war was over, started preaching, and for fifty years served Massachusetts sea-going people.

His speech was native to him and his experiences. Emerson rightly spoke of him as a poet, for his grasp was for the metaphor which flashes with meaning. Emerson has written that God speaks in tropes; Taylor interpreted God and the world to his auditors in tropes. He could say that St. Peter was "the last end of a thunderstorm, softened by the breath of the Almighty." Christ was a life-boat. His sermon was filled with the sea-life imagery which was such an intimate part of his thinking. Icebergs, storm, waves, the anchor, drifting, the rudder, deep waters, the comforting port—such were the metaphorical elements of his discourse.

Emerson was a Boston minister when Taylor became the captain of Seaman's Bethel, and Taylor was very fond of the quiet, eloquent, scholarly Emerson. Emerson, he said, "is more like Jesus Christ than anyone I have ever known." But Taylor's warm and active spiritual vitality did not accord with Emerson's more aloof and coldly skeptical withdrawal from the Unitarian ministry. Taylor showed the depth and humanity of his own life in his wholehearted acceptance of the living Emerson while at the same time rejecting his religious inadequacy.

Emerson, he said, is "the sweetest soul God ever made; but he knows no more of theology than Balaam's ass did of Hebrew grammar.—If the devil got him, he would never know what to do with him. There seems to me to be a screw loose somewhere, but I could never tell where; for, listen as close as I might, I could never hear any jar in the machinery."

When Taylor wanted to praise some older ministers whom he thought of as moral giants, he said that "when God made them He rolled up His sleeves to the armpits. They are like camels bearing precious spices and browsing on bitter herbs. They deserve to be carried on beds of down, their horses should be fed on golden oats, and they on preserved diamonds."

It is no wonder that Emerson said, "The wonderful and laughing life of his illustration keeps us broad awake."

And he kept his auditors awake by his own vitality. Here was a man who could not "make" a speech: he *was* a speech. Speech flowed through him and became a flame.

Emerson spoke of his complete lack of method in the handling of his material, even of the chaos of his "bewildering oratory." Emerson knew that one could not examine with any critical faculty the great eloquence which continuously inspired and elevated his audiences. "A creature of instinct," wrote Emerson, "his colors are all opaline and dove's-neck-lustre and can only be seen at a distance. Examine them, and they disappear."

Taylor did not achieve his results with the craftsman's method. He did not erect structures of speech. His muse was no offspring of the formal outline but rather of the fountain. Speech came from him alive. This aliveness of Taylor's was always a present part of Emerson's attempts to catch the spirit of this unusual and glorious man. "His exceeding life throws other gifts into deep shade."

On the first Sunday of 1835 Emerson attended two church services in Boston and contrasted them. In the morning he went to the Swedenborg Chapel where he heard a "severely simple" sermon, in method and manner much like a proposition in geometry, wholly uncolored and unimpassioned.

"At the opposite pole, say rather in another Zone from this hard truist, was Taylor, in the afternoon, wishing his sons a happy new year, praying God for his servants of the brine, to favor commerce, the bleached sail, the white foam, and through commerce to Christianize the universe . . . And so he went on, —this poet of the sailor and of Ann Street,—fusing all the rude hearts of his auditory with the heat of his own love. . ."

Emerson tries again and again to "understand" and analyze what it was that made the living Father Taylor such an experience for those who heard him, recognizing and yet not recognizing that this living spirit in its very vitality could only in the shallowest way yield to analysis, while its glory lay in its relationship to the living uniqueness of the man being himself, loving, caring, sharing, finding mankind in need and pouring forth whatever element of truth or light he found at that moment to minister to man's condition of need.

He is, wrote Emerson "a work of the same hand that made Demosthenes and Shakspear and Burns, and is guided by instincts diviner than rules. His whole discourse is a string of audacious felicities harmonized by a spirit of joyful love. Every-

body is cheered and exalted by him. He is a living man...."

When Charles Dickens tried to see what made up the quality of Taylor's compelling eloquence, he was also reminded of the way Taylor put himself into sympathy with his audience: "...he studied their sympathies and understandings much more than the display of his own powers."

Here was a man who could speak to all men, of whatever color or condition, poet or grocer, educated or illiterate seaman. Emerson thought that the basic factor of his ability in coming to all men with an immediacy of appeal was that he let himself speak. He was the speaker. There was no pose, no posture, no craft: there was the living man. "He is mighty Nature's child," said Emerson. "He speaks himself."

This genuineness gives him assurance and poise and grace. "He is perfectly sure in his generous humanity. He rolls the world into a ball and tosses it from hand to hand. He says touching things, plain things, grand things, cogent things, which all men must perforce hear. He says them with hand and head and body and voice; the accompaniment is total and even varied. ... Free happy expression of himself and of the deeps of human nature, of the happier, sunny facts of life, of things connected and lying amassed and grouped in healthy nature, that is his power and his teacher."

Here was Emerson's Man Speaking. Did any other man using human voice ever stir him to such efforts to analyze and understand human eloquence? This scarcely educated saint who experienced life and uttered forth his experience, whose life was speech and whose speech was life, captured Emerson's imagination and held his attention over forty years, embodying much of what Emerson tried in many ways to say of the nature of eloquence.

Taylor's presence in private conversation held the same charm and magic as his public utterance. "I delight in his great personality," wrote Emerson, thinking of private conversations, "the way and sweep of the man..." If Taylor had developed a theory of speech—which he wouldn't have done—he probably would have had a view similar to Emerson's, that true speech must come from a living fountain, "...so much love poured out through so much imagination..."

# *Thoreau Finds the Dawn in Asia*

NO other native American writer, in his thinking and in his writing, is more completely a tie between the Orient and the Occident than Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), who lived his life in and around Concord, Massachusetts, but whose thoughts ranged freely and whose reading knew no geography. Gandhi has acknowledged his own indebtedness to Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience" and other writings; and thus through the great saint of modern India, Thoreau has helped form the character of Asia. Thoreau frequently spoke of the way he drew strength from the wisdom and spiritual insight of Asiatic writers.

Thoreau's paternal family came from the island of Jersey off the coast of France. He was born in Concord, probably America's most famous village, and graduated at the age of twenty from Harvard College. During his mid-college summer vacation he taught village school a term at Canton, Massachusetts; but he did not begin his acquaintance with Oriental thought and literature until the year following his college graduation.

Certainly one of the real excitements of nineteenth century America was the discovery of Indian thought—which came two generations after American merchantmen had discovered Chinese merchandise. This new discovery of Asia centered in the Transcendentalists of New England, in the *Dial* magazine, in Concord township—where were gathered Emerson, Thoreau, Alcott,



Margaret Fuller, and other kindred spirits—, and, especially, in the talk and writing of Thoreau.

This small, rather unusual looking Yankee who made himself completely at home and a part of nature in his village heard the murmurs of many a famous river from the other side of the globe, even as he looked into the clear waters of Walden Pond or paddled his home-made boat on the Concord River.

This Henry Thoreau is not an easy man or writer to understand. His writing style is paradoxical, as were his interests and his nature. He used the stars to know his native river. He used the wisdom of Asia to know what to do with his morning hours. He had a scientific interest, but with a difference, a philosophical interest, but with a difference; a theological interest, but with a vast and puzzling difference. He was a poet—who wrote little poetry; a surveyor, who surveyed his own inner areas more than he did the land of Massachusetts; a pencil maker who used more writing instruments than he sold; a writer who was passionately interested in getting said to people what he wanted to say, but who seemed to care little for the amenities of publication and public communication.

He was a New Englander, a Yankee, a local man carried almost to the ludicrous extreme; and yet he was at home in the world, using the ideas, the insight, the beauty, the gifted spirit, of ancient Greece or far-off Orient with the same natural ease with which he paddled his boat on Concord River. The very pattern of individual independency, he was eclectic in the extreme; and in his first book, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, he referred to or quoted from at least 128 different writers, ranging over the world and through the centuries, as he said, for texts for his already written sermons.

In his *Journal* for May, 1841, (he has one of the richest journals in all literature) he recorded his delight with *The Laws of Menu*:

“When my imagination travels eastward and backward to those remote years of the Gods, I seem to draw near to the habitation of the morning, and the dawn at length has a place. I remember the book as an hour before sunrise.”

Three months later he was still enthusiastic:

The impression which those sublime sentences made on me last

night has awakened me before any cock crowing. Their influence lingers around me like a fragrance.

The very locusts and crickets of a summer day are but later or older glosses on the Dherma Sastra of the Hindoos, a continuation of the sacred code.

A month later he was using the ancient wisdom as a measuring rod to disparage his own age:

The sublime sentences of Menu carry us back to a time when purification and sacrifice and self-devotion had a place in the faith of men, and were not as now a superstition. The *Laws of Menu* are a manual of private devotion, so private and domestic and yet so public and universal a word as is not spoken in the parlor or pulpit in these days

When Thoreau came to his writing of *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, he made use of his earlier journal reflections, particularly using these passages on the *Laws of Menu*, adding to his earlier impressions and relating this work to the body of Hindu sacred literature. He sees that the ancient thought is still applicable in Concord. It is domestic and private—and universal.

The sentences open, as we read them, unexpensively, and, at first, almost unmeaningly, as the petals of a flower, yet they sometimes startle us with that rare kind of wisdom which could only have been learned from the most trivial experience; but it comes to us as refined as the porcelain earth which subsides to the bottom of the ocean.

That Thoreau was from his twenty-first year on to the end of his life greatly interested in the Oriental religious and philosophical approach to man and man's condition in the universe is certain. His two published books quote from, refer to, and interpret the Eastern scriptures. "The reading which I love best," he wrote, "is the scriptures of the several nations, though it happens that I am better acquainted with those of the Hindoos, the Chinese, and the Persians, than of the Hebrews, which I have come to last." Asia had produced more civilizations, involving a greater proportion of mankind, over a longer period of time, on a higher level of continuity than any other portion of the earth. It was the fabled cradle of man and the arts. It had produced the higher religions and was the center of the first universal religion, Buddhism. Thoreau's inquiry for the one bottom of the universe drove him constantly to ward the dawn in Asia.

An Englishman, Thomas Cholmondeley, who had previously visited in Concord, wrote to Thoreau, October 3, 1855, "I have

been busily collecting a nest of Indian books for you..." The books arrived in Concord on November 30, forty-four volumes in all, some in English, French, Latin, Greek, and Sanskrit, many of them in beautiful leather binding. Thoreau made a special bookcase for them, fashioned out of drift wood that he had brought home in his voyages along the Musketaquid, "thus giving Oriental wisdom an Occidental shrine." Among the manuscripts which he left at his death was a translation, "The Transmigration of the Seven Brahmans," from the *Harivansa*, though Thoreau translated it from a French version and not from the Indian.

He was, indeed, persistently interested in Oriental literature—especially the Indian—and he also was a Concord villager. He knew his environs, whether prairie dog colony, fox den, farmer sledding rocks out of his field with a yoke of oxen; silent fisherman on the bank of Concord River; or worker in the cranberry bogs—he knew that such humanity as peopled Concord inhabited the earth. If Thoreau was to know mankind he could begin where he was. He needed to find himself in contemplative leisure; and his access to the universe was through himself.

"Let the immortal depth of your soul lead you, but earnestly extend your eyes upward." Thoreau, in finding himself, used his senses to study the world and also developed his infinite capacity for leisure. He wrote to his friend Blake, "Do what you love. Know your own bone; gnaw at it, bury it, unearth it, and gnaw it still." His book, *Walden*, is an example of how he did gnaw his bone, making sure that it was genuinely his bone he was gnawing and not some imitation imposed by social conventions.

At the beginning of the chapter, "Sounds," in *Walden*, is a delightful picture of Thoreau at rest, sitting in the sunny doorway of his cabin from sunrise until noon, in revery and solitude, growing. It is here in this connection that he says, "I realized what the Orientals mean by contemplation and the forsaking of works." Follow your genius closely enough, he observed, and it will not fail to show you a fresh prospect every hour.

More than most Occidentals, Thoreau did practice contemplation. He, like the Transcendentalists generally, and Wordsworth, and many others, spoke of the need for solitary communion with the Infinite. This seemed to be the quality of Oriental thought which he came to with admiration. "What extracts from the

Vedas I have read fall on me like light of a higher and purer luminary, which describes a loftier course through a purer stratum, —free from particulars, simple, universal.” To achieve his purer stratum was certainly part of his goal. In one letter he presented the extreme statement: “Depend upon it that, rude and careless as I am, I would fain practice the Yoga faithfully. . . . To some extent, and at rare intervals, even I am a Yogi.”

He sometimes reminded his acquaintances of the Eastern mystic, for a contemporary of his, John Weiss, wrote of him that his

countenance was unruffled; it seemed to lie deep, like a mountain tarn, with cool, still nature all around. There was not a line upon it expressive of ambition or discontent: the affectional emotions had not fretted at it. He went about, like a priest of Buddha who expects to arrive soon at the summit of a life of contemplation, where the divine absorbs the human.

John Weiss rightly emphasized in Thoreau the contemplative quality: Thoreau himself emphasized it in deed, going far beyond his word. However, despite Thoreau's feeling of sympathy for Oriental contemplation, despite the strong attractions it had for him, he would not let himself yield. He is like the Ulysses who, knowing that he would be pulled by the siren's song, had himself securely tied to the mast of his ship and had his ears stopped with sealing wax. Thoreau resisted: and here is part of the persistent paradox of his nature. Extreme as he was in his praise and even, at times, as devoted as he was in his conduct, he yet was no Yogi, no priest of Buddha—and he emphasized also why he was not, and never could be, at ease in the Buddhist way.

The dominant theme in Indian religions has been life-negation. The kingdom of Buddha is a kingdom of no-world. This no-world is the goal of the Indian sage. He leaves the world behind.

A recent conversational exchange between a Westerner and a Hindu mystic visiting the West illustrates the differences which Thoreau was never unaware of.

“While I am making my soul, sitting here meditating,” said the Occidental, “My brother may be run over by a car in the street. Is not the higher work to go and rescue him?”

“Oh, No,” replied the Hindu. “That is for men who are beginning the way of holiness.”

Thoreau believed that he was far along on the way of holiness, and he did not believe that that way required the turning of one's back on the world. He was interested in Johnny Riordan, a poor, cold, hungry, Irish boy, and Anthony Burns, a free Negro who was having trouble maintaining his free status; the Mexican War and the Fugitive Slave Law. He did not want to tolerate, or ignore, or go away and leave the dictatorship of King Prejudice. Man needs to be spiritualized, yes; but he also needs to be *naturalized* (the italics is Thoreau's) on the soil of earth. He went to live a life of contemplative leisure at Walden Pond—though while he was there he was actively too busy, writing, observing, walking, visiting with men and nature, for the Oriental ideal of contemplation; but he also went away from Walden Pond after twenty-six months of that life, "for as good a reason" as he went there. His figurative language is beautiful as he explains why he left Walden, and his argument is convincing. He positively did not wish to become a Yogi, a priest of Buddha, a contemplative saint. He wished rather, "to go before the mast and on the deck of the world."

He knew of the penance patterns of the Brahmans, and he did not approve of them; also he knew of the penance patterns of the custom-ridden Westerners, and he did not approve of them either.

In one passage of *A Week*, he says, that the Brahman never assaults any evil. The Oriental, he goes on to say, has nothing to do in this world; the Occidental is too full of activity. Thus there is a constant struggle within every nation between these two poles. In mid-nineteenth century America, he saw the need for an emphasis in the direction of contemplation. He had energy enough for both aspects of life. He fought against evil in the most radical manner, attacking its roots rather than hacking at a few branches. And, in order to see clearly what he was doing, in order to maintain perspective and direction, he sought out the quiet countryside, the river bank, the deep, clear pond, and became, for a time, a detached man.

All laborers must have their nooning, and at this season of the day, we are all, more or less, Asiatics, and give over all work and reform. While lying thus on our oars by the side of the stream, in the heat of the day...and slicing the melons, which are a fruit of the east, our thoughts reverted to Arabia, Persia, and Hindostan, the lands of con-

templation and dwelling places of the ruminant nations. In the experience of this noontide we could find some apology even for the instinct of the opium, betel, and tobacco chewers.. We thought that we might lead a dignified oriental life along this stream as well, and the maple and alders would be our Kat trees.

The Orient became part of Thoreau's life, thought, and expression. It was a valuable and needed part. It enriched and complemented his natural tendencies. It helped him to see how the foundations of the world were laid. But however rosy and fresh and tempting he found the dawn from Asia, he said, "Yes," to the world rather than, "No." When he learned to see, smell, taste, hear, and feel "that everlasting Something to which we are allied," he had no intention of turning his back on the world. He still knew that whatever the ultimate cost might be, his place was before the mast on the deck of the world.

# *A Second Look* *at* Bartleby

**H**ERMAN MELVILLE'S "Bartleby" has received little attention from the Melville critics or commentators, even though it stands as one of the two examples of his writing for 1853, the year following the writing and publication of *Pierre*, and at the beginning of his period of lesser prose writing before his long silence. Its position relative to his other work, if no other reason suffices, should assure it some attention, and it has not been entirely overlooked. In fact, a greater unanimity regarding it prevails among those Melville commentators who have mentioned it than on any of his major works. Two conclusions have several times been drawn regarding it, substantially in the same way: (1) that it is a good story and (2) that it is a picture of Melville's mind, both at the time the story was published and indicating what his attitude was to become.

John Freeman, the English biographer of Melville, asserted that, while the other stories in *The Piazza Tales* are comparatively insignificant, two of them, "Bartleby" and "Benito Cereno," are superb. "Bartleby," he wrote, "is an exercise in unrelieved pathos, the pathos of an exile in city life, faint counterpart of Melville's own isolation and gathering silence." Raymond Weaver, to whom admirers of Melville will be forever indebted for his competent critical and biographical work, reserves his highest praise of *The Piazza Tales* for "Benito Cereno" and "The Encantadas." But he does recognize the importance and value of this volume of

stories in gaining a view of Melville as an artist: "They are of prime importance, not only for their inherent qualities as works of art, but because of the very peculiar position they hold in Melville's development both as an artist and as a man." Weaver included "Bartleby" in the volume *Shorter Novels of Herman Melville*, which he edited with a very fine Introduction. "And for twenty years," Weaver wrote, in the course of a biographical comment, "morning and evening, between 26th Street and the foot of Gansevoort Street, East River, an inconspicuous and elderly private citizen—a man whose history had been partly told and partly foreshadowed in *Bartleby the Scrivener*—walked with his own private thoughts."

Lewis Mumford, in his biography, saw in even more detail the mirrored view of Melville's mind in *Bartleby's* withdrawal from life.

Mumford wrote:

Bartleby is a good story in itself: it also affords us a glimpse of Melville's own drift of mind in this miserable year: the point of the story plainly indicates Melville's present dilemma. People would admit him to their circle and give him bread and employment only if he would abandon his inner purpose: to this his answer was—I would prefer not to.

This latter clause is *Bartleby's* answer, frequently repeated. Mumford supposes that Melville's persistence in minding his own spiritual affairs alienated those who could help him, made them impatient,

for in the end, they foresaw they would be obliged to throw him off, and he would find himself in prison, not in the visible prison for restraining criminals, but in the pervasive prison of dull routine and meaningless activity. When that happened there would be no use assuring him that he lived in a kindly world of blue sky and green grass. "I know where I am!" Whether or not Melville consciously projected his own intuition of his fate, there is no doubt in my mind [this is Mumford's statement] that, as early as 1853, he was already formulating his answer. To those kind, pragmatic friends and relatives who suggested that he go into business and make a good living, or at least write the sort of books that the public would read—it amounts to pretty much the same thing—he kept on giving one stereotyped and monotonous answer: I would prefer not to. The dead-wall reverie would end in a resolution as blank and forbidding as the wall that faced him: a bleak face, a tight wounded mouth, the little blue eyes more dim, remote, and obstinate than ever: I would prefer not to!



"Bartleby" is the story of a man who gradually withdrew within himself, cutting off, one by one, the bonds of human fellowship and association until he stood alone, completely—blank and silent. His attitude toward life was a gradually progressive nonviolent nonco-operation—even while he attached himself as a parasite to his employer and benevolent guardian. (This, the reader must be assured, is an inadequate and unfriendly summing-up of "Bartleby," which will be modified before this essay is finished.) I should like to suggest that the germ of the character Bartleby came not from Melville's searchings of his own relationship to society or from any bitterness in his hardening heart but from an external contemporary source, namely, Thoreau's withdrawal from society.

Melville, so far as I know, does not mention Thoreau directly by name in any of his writing, whether his literary work, letters, or various journal jottings. He mentions Emerson several times; he reviewed Cooper for the magazines; he has some comment to make on Dana, Irving, and many minor writers. He, of course, has much comment on Hawthorne, with whom he was closely associated for a year and a half, and the various writers of the Duyckinck circle. However, his omission of Thoreau's name—while he was naming other writers—did not mean that he was ignoring Thoreau.

In 1850 Melville borrowed Thoreau's *Merrimack* from Evert Duyckinck's private library. He had ample opportunity to know much about Thoreau. His interest in Emerson in 1849 might have prompted him to ask Duyckinck for Thoreau's *Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*. His friendship with the Hawthornes in the Berkshires in 1850 and 1851 certainly gave him occasion to hear of the various Concord characters. Hawthorne was for a time strongly attracted toward Thoreau. He greatly admired his workmanship and his skill in handling a small boat. Thoreau was, as Hawthorne tells us in his *Notebooks*, an occasional guest of the Hawthornes and a companion of Nathaniel in field and stream. Mrs. Hawthorne and her sister, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, showed great interest in the American writers, especially in the Concord writers.

Hawthorne lived in Concord during the time of Thoreau's residence in the cabin by Walden Pond, his so-called hermitage,

and Thoreau's experiment in withdrawing from society was probably discussed between the Melvilles and Hawthornes on occasion or on many occasions during their period of close relationship. However, even supposing that no one who knew Thoreau ever expressed an opinion of him to Melville—a most unlikely supposition—still Melville had ample opportunity to get the basis for his "Bartleby" from the so-called hermit of Walden Pond. He had available to him a published source which he used both in general outline and in some detail.

In 1849 Sophia Peabody Hawthorne's sister, a prominent member of the Transcendentalist group, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, edited a book called *Aesthetic Papers*. This volume, which Melville undoubtedly had a chance to see in the Hawthorne home<sup>1</sup> if he did not himself have a copy of it, contained one of Hawthorne's longer historical tales, "Main-Street," Emerson's essay, "War", and an essay by Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government." This essay, now generally known as "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience," is known to all readers of Thoreau and is considered to have influenced Gandhi's activities in South Africa and India. It also served as a basis for Bartleby, who long preceded Gandhi in passive nonco-operation.

Thoreau argues that the American government—the government of slavery, engaged in the Mexican War unjustly—was such that a man "cannot without disgrace be associated with it. I cannot for an instant recognize that political organization as *my* government which is the *slave's* government also." Why do not people who want the Union dissolved, he asks, "dissolve it themselves—the union between themselves and the State?" "The proper place to-day, the only place which Massachusetts has provided for her freer and less desponding spirits, is in her prisons, to be put out and locked out of the State by her own act, as they have already put themselves out by their principles."

In this essay Thoreau tells the story of his own withdrawal from organized society and of his imprisonment for nonco-

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1. The copy of *Aesthetic Papers* which I have in hand for this study, curiously enough, came from the library of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Melville's friend and neighbor in the Berkshires. It is owned by the V.L. Parrington branch of the University of Washington Library.

operation. "Pay, or be locked up in the jail," the state said. "I declined to pay." This is like *Bartleby's* often reiterated "I would prefer not to." Thoreau did not wish to pay a tax to aid in supporting the church. At the request of the selectmen, he gave them a formal statement :

"Know all men by these presents, that I, Henry Thoreau, do not wish to be regarded as a member of any incorporated society which I have not joined " This I gave to the town clerk, and he has it. The State, having thus learned that I did not wish to be regarded as a member of that church, has never made a like demand on me since . If I had known how to name them, I should then have signed off in detail from all the societies which I never signed on to, but I did not know where to find a complete list.

Thoreau then tells of his night in jail for not paying his poll tax. Here are some passages which suggested much to Melville. Thoreau says with a defiance which Melville must have admired: "I was not born to be forced. I will breathe after my own fashion." *Bartleby's* associates, his neighbors, his jailors even, did not know what to make of him, and Thoreau had found the same reaction of bewilderment. "They plainly did not know how to treat me...for they thought that my chief desire was to stand the other side of that stone wall."

The kernel of Thoreau's thought is this: "It is for no particular item in the tax-bill that I refuse to pay it. I simply wish to refuse allegiance to the State, to withdraw and stand aloof from it effectually." This is the kind of challenge which intrigued Melville and set his mind to working out implications. Here is a man who lives in society, certainly to a real extent dependent upon it, yet withdrawing, aloof. *Bartleby*, when asked to join in co-operative tasks, replies, "I would prefer not to." He gives no reasons. He simply wishes to refuse. Thoreau's advice is explicit. He is encouraging a withdrawal from life, even an attaching of one's self to others, as he had built his cabin on Emerson's land. "You must hire or squat somewhere, and raise but a small crop, and eat that soon. You must live within yourself, and depend upon yourself, always tucked up and ready for a start, and not have many affairs." This is just the kind of practice which makes of *Bartleby's* life a cipher, a zero: Squat somewhere, and live within yourself. "I can afford to refuse allegiance to Massachusetts," Thoreau boasts, "and her right to my property and life." Melville quietly writes a satire to show

that one cannot afford such a boast: to squat somewhere and live within yourself is to refrain from living.

Bartleby in many ways, both outwardly and inwardly, parallels Thoreau. Bartleby was a scrivener, that is, a writer, a copyist. When once asked what he was doing, Thoreau replied, "Keeping a journal." He, too, was a scrivener, a writer. In fact, Melville was undoubtedly aware that Thoreau was generally accused of being a "copyist" himself, a copyer of Emerson, as Lowell pictures him in *A Fable for Critics*. Melville may or may not ever have seen Thoreau, but his first brief glance at Bartleby and the comment it called forth might have been made by many observers on seeing Thoreau. Bartleby, "a motionless young man," stood at the door. "I can see that figure now—pallidly neat, pitiably respectable, incurably forlorn!"

Bartleby is installed as scrivener in the law office in a manner such as to leave him within call, yet out of sight of his employer. "And thus, in a manner, privacy and society were conjoined." Even as Thoreau was, while close to Concord, yet isolated from it, out of sight behind the screen of green trees, so also Bartleby was installed in a hermitage behind a high green folding screen near his employer's desk. The new scrivener at first worked industriously: "As if long famishing for something to copy, he seemed to gorge himself on my documents. There was no pause for digestion. He ran a day and night line, copying by sun-light and by candle-light." Melville may well have remembered the myriad classical allusions, references, quotations in the *Week*. Probably he was aware of Thoreau's lack of humor and local reputation for aloofness when he said of Bartleby: "But he wrote on silently, palely, mechanically."

When Bartleby's copy is to be verified with the original, a type of work involving the joint labors of two or more men, Bartleby declines to help. "I would prefer not to," is his response. He is steadfast in his refusal. To the question "*Why* do your refuse?" he but answers, "I would prefer not to."

The three office clerks represent the variety of public opinion toward such a withdrawal from co-operative work. The employer appeals to them to support him in urging the adamant Bartleby to join in the work.

"Am I right?" he asks.

"With submission, sir," said Turkey, in his blandest tone, "I think you are."

"I think I should kick him out of the office," is Nippers' view.

"I think, sir, he's a little *lunny*," replied Ginger Nut with a grin.

But Bartleby has his way. He does not choose to help verify copy. Others must do his work, the work which normally would be expected of him. Thoreau lived on Emerson's land by Walden Pond. He borrowed Alcott's ax. Someone else paid his tax to keep him out of prison. "In fact," Thoreau wrote in his essay, "I quietly declare war with the State, after my fashion, though I will still make what use and get what advantage of her I can, as is usual in such cases."

Melville was so fond of good food, good drink, and good fellowship that the vagaries in Thoreau's diet offered themselves as subject for jest. Bartleby remained in his "hermitage," his little corner of the office, even at mealtime. He was in the office first in the morning and last at night. In fact, he—like the camel which thrust its nose in the tent—took up quarters in the office. If he were to make his withdrawal effective, it must depend on someone else. He did not go out for food. Food must be brought to him. Ginger Nut, the office boy, is regularly sent out to return with a bag of ginger nuts, a dry, hard cookie.

He lives, then, on ginger-nuts, thought I; never eats a dinner, properly speaking; he must be a vegetarian, then; but no; he never eats even vegetables, he eats nothing but ginger-nuts. My mind then ran on in reveries concerning the probable effects upon the human constitution of living entirely on ginger-nuts.

Bartleby's firm position, that of refusing to assist in verifying copy, is accepted by his employer with a tolerant ease. The eccentric scrivener was perfectly harmless in his passivity. Moreover, "it is plain he intends no insolence; his aspect sufficiently evinces that his eccentricities are involuntary." But the strange wilfulness of Bartleby expresses itself in additional ways. At first he will not verify copy—"I would prefer not to;" is his way of putting it. Then he also would prefer not to go to the post office to look for mail. He refuses to do an errand even within the office.

In fact, he declines to hold his finger on a string to aid in tying a knot.

Shall I acknowledge it? The conclusion of this whole business was, that it soon became a fixed fact of my chambers, that a pale young scrivener, by the name of Bartleby, had a desk there; that he copied for me...., but he was permanently exempt from examining the work done by him....; moreover, said Bartleby was never, on any account, to be dispatched on the most trivial errand of any sort; and that even if entreated to take upon him such a matter, it was generally understood that he would "prefer not to"—in other words, that he would refuse point-blank.

He is progressively living within himself!

This is Melville's picture of the Thoreau he abstracted from "Resistance to Civil Government," probably embellished and enlarged by Melville's conversations with Nathaniel and Mrs. Hawthorne. Bartleby is a *reductio ad absurdum* of the convictions Thoreau expressed: "I declined to pay." "...I can afford to refuse allegiance...." "I, Henry Thoreau, do not wish to be regarded as a member of any incorporated society which I have not joined." "I was not born to be forced. I will breathe after my own fashion." "It is for no particular item in the tax-bill that I refuse to pay it. I simply wish to refuse allegiance to the State, to withdraw and stand aloof from it effectually." Bartleby, too, simply wished to refuse. He stood aloof. He never gave reasons. He never argued. He embodied passive nonco-operation. He was a squatter, and he lived within himself.

Bartleby takes up quarters in the office—even his employer does not know when—spending his days and nights there, eating and sleeping there, attending to his personal toilet and laundry there. He takes over the offices, requesting the employer to come in only during working hours. But the employer-narrator of the story is not outraged by such usurpation. He is rather overwhelmed by the thought of Bartleby's loneliness, the solitude of his life.

Such an aspect of Thoreau's professed withdrawal from society and life alone in a cabin would have strongly impressed the companionable, sociable Melville. For he himself, too, was feeling the loneliness of the life at Arrowhead, away from the many friends he had enjoyed in New York. In 1850 and again in 1851 his New York friends had visited him. The Hawthornes had

lived but a few miles away over the hills, and he had been meeting new friends. But in 1852 the Hawthornes were gone from the Berkshires, the Duyckincks and their circle of friends did not come again; Melville was feeling the loneliness of his new life. He had been feted in London, dined and entertained in New York, a popular author; but now even his neighbors were a little suspicious of him, and he was cut off from fellowship, by distance, by poverty, and by the feeling that his literary work was no longer given approval. It may well be that Melville's own sense of isolation entered into the employer's feeling toward Bartleby:

For the first time in my life a feeling of over-powering stinging melancholy seized me. Before, I had never experienced aught but a not displeasing sadness. The bond of a common humanity now drew me irresistibly to gloom. A fraternal melancholy? For both I and Bartleby were sons of Adam .. What I saw that morning persuaded me that the scrivener was the victim of innate and incurable disorder. I might give alms to his body; but his body did not pain him, it was his soul that suffered, and his soul I could not reach.

With all kindness the employer attempts to establish a fellow-communion with Bartleby. But Bartleby prefers not to talk, to answer questions, to say anything of himself or his circumstances. He even decides to do no more writing: "I have given up copying," he says. Now, doing no work he was completely a squatter in the office. More than that, cut off from everyone, he was but a squatter in the universe, absolutely alone, "a bit of wreck in the mid-Atlantic."

Still he refuses to leave the office. Melville sees and enjoys the wry humor in such a situation. Bartleby is withdrawn from all social contacts, he is living within himself, but his very presence demonstrates the absurdity of his situation. Bartleby's employer contemplates the possibilities of an assumption on his own part. If Bartleby assumes that he has no relationships with or obligations to society, why not have society in turn assume that this assuming ex-scrivener did not exist? He thinks :

I might enter my office in a great hurry, and pretending not to see Bartleby at all, walk straight against him as if he were air. Such a proceeding would in a singular degree have the appearance of a home-thrust. It was hardly possible that Bartleby could withstand such an application of the doctrine of assumptions.

But he decides against such direct action, instead accosting Bartleby with some impatience.

"What earthly right have you to stay here? Do you pay any rent? Do you pay any taxes? Or is this property yours?"

He answered nothing.

"Are you ready to go on and write now? . . . In a word, will you do anything at all, to give a coloring to your refusal to depart the premises?"

He silently retired into his hermitage.

Thoreau, in speaking of his experience in Concord jail in "Resistance to Civil Government," mentions how his fellow-prisoner occupied one window while he looked out the other and concludes, "I saw that if one stayed there long, his principal business would be to look out the window." Bartleby does find in his self-imprisonment that he leaves himself nothing to do but look out the window, in his case, a window opening on a blank wall. "I noticed," the employer observes, "that Bartleby did nothing but stand at his window in his dead-wall revery." Again: "Bartleby remained standing at his window in one of his profoundest dead-wall reveries."

Bartleby is established as a fixture in the office, as a piece of furniture, harmless, useless, silent. There the story reaches its extreme application, but for one turning. The employer was reconciled to Bartleby; the office workers were reconciled to him; he was accepted as a squatter and so might have continued. But the outside world, clients and visiting lawyers, did not understand Bartleby or the strange relationship—or lack of relationship—existing between him and the other people whose destiny it was to occupy the same bit of the world he inhabited. Other people, outsiders, made remarks. They thought the situation queer. The employer was becoming the subject of gossip.

"I resolved to gather all my faculties together, and forever rid me of this intolerable incubus." Go he must. But he would not go! "Since he will not quit me, I must quit him." However, even this stratagem is not enough to save him from the man of no obligation, the man who had withdrawn from everything. Bartleby remains in the emptied quarters. "You are responsible for the man you left there," the next tenant says accusingly to Bartleby's benefactor.

Bartleby—this man who would not feel the importance of human ties, who had cut himself off from all social contacts (so he foolishly imagined)—soon had the entire building, even the



street, in a state of indignant excitement. Locked out of the offices, he persisted "in haunting the building generally, sitting upon the banisters of the stairs by day, and sleeping in the entry by night. Everybody is concerned; clients are leaving the offices; some fears are entertained of a mob; something you must do, and that without delay." This urgent challenge is hurled at the former employer, who had hoped to rid himself of Bartleby. But organized society could not dispense with Bartleby as easily as Bartleby could dispense with society.

The logical absurdity of Bartleby's position is emphasized in one brief conversation—brief, yet so much the longest of Bartleby's remarks as to appear loquacious.

"What are you doing here, Bartleby?" said I.

"Sitting upon the banister," he mildly replied . . .

"Would you like to re-engage in copying for someone?"

"No, I would prefer not to make any change."

"Would you like a clerkship in a dry-goods store?"

"There is too much confinement about that . . . But I am not particular."

"Too much confinement," I cried. "Why, you keep yourself confined all the time?"

"I would prefer not to take a clerkship," he rejoined, as if to settle that little item at once.

Bartender? No. Collecting bills for a merchant? No. Travel to Europe as a companion? No, but I am not particular! "I like to be stationary."

Bartleby gets that privilege in jail. Even as Henry Thoreau went quietly to the Concord jail with Constable Sam Staples, so, too, did Bartleby.

As I afterward learned, the poor scrivener, when told that he must be conducted to the Tombs, offered not the slightest obstacle, but, in his pale, unmoving way, silently acquiesced.

Some of the compassionate and curious bystanders joined the party; and headed by one of the constables arm in arm with Bartleby, the silent procession filed its way through all the noise, and heat, and joy of the roaring thoroughfares at noon.

Melville's plan of telling the story of Bartleby does not permit him to contemplate the thoughts of that prison inmate, as Thoreau could reveal his own thoughts in like circumstance. But Bartleby is found by his benefactor "standing all alone in the

quietest of the yards, his face toward a high wall," much as Thoreau "stood considering the walls of solid stone." Thoreau wrote: "They plainly did not know how to treat me, but behaved like persons who are underbred. In every threat and in every compliment there was a blunder; for they thought that my chief desire was to stand the other side of that stone wall." *Bartleby* might well have said—or thought—the same. Melville in narrative form presents the ill-timed compliment and the underbred commentator, the loquacious grubman.

*Bartleby* avoids every attempt to establish relationships with him. He moves away even from food and takes up a position "fronting the dead wall." This is the ultimate in his withdrawal: he ceases to eat and is soon at peace, asleep "with kings and counsellors."

Such is the end to the kind of individualism Thoreau portrayed in "Resistance to Civil Government"—the end carried to its logical and absurd conclusion. "I declined to pay," said Thoreau, "I was not born to be forced. I will breathe after my own fashion." "Depend upon yourself." When Thoreau declined to pay, someone else paid for him, as he acknowledges in the essay. Melville was attracted by paradox. He often wished to imagine an example worked out to its logical conclusion. He certainly admired some of the heroic stubbornness of Thoreau even as he is often very sympathetic with *Bartleby*. But that admiration does not prevent his seeing the absurdity of some of Thoreau's extreme pronouncements in this essay.

Thoreau wishes to choose what he will do and what he will not do. He prefers not to do some things. Let that "preferring not to" become progressively more extended. What then? Moreover, someone makes up for the deficiency. Who paid Thoreau's tax? On whose land did he live? Who acted as his benefactor?

In "*Bartleby*," Melville has a reference to the notorious New York murder where Colt killed Adams in a fit of imprudent resentment and anger. He then makes the application that even self-interest—if no better reason can be found—demands a charitable attitude. "A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another." Even though Melville must have been intrigued by his character *Bartleby* and admired the self-sufficiency of the man,

yet he shows us the implications of such an independent course of action. Bartleby became less and less a man until there was nothing left of him. There can be no such thing as an effective life of aloofness. When Thoreau wrote, "I simply wish to refuse allegiance to the State, to withdraw and stand aloof from it effectually," he was but expressing an absurdity.

Thoreau could write, as he did in his journal for January 16, 1852: "Here was one [Bill Wheeler] who went alone, did no work, and had no relatives that I knew of, was not ambitious that I could see, did not depend on the good opinion of men." If Melville had seen this sentence he would have asked, with a raised eyebrow or a sly wink: "No relatives? Not even a mother? Or a father? No work? On whose efforts does he depend, even if he does not depend on opinions?"

In April of that year before Melville was to write "Bartleby," Thoreau confided to his journal: "Society, man, has no prize to offer me that can tempt me; not one . . . . When I am most myself and see the clearest, men are least to be seen. . . ." "Bartleby" seems to be written in answer to such thought as this. The pathos of "Bartleby" need not blind us to the implications of the story. Try as you will, you cannot cut yourself off from society, and to persist in such a direction can only destroy the individual.

It is possible that Melville, who enjoyed a pun almost as well as he enjoyed enigmas and puzzling allusions generally, may have had a sly reference to Thoreau's extended use of ancient and oriental literature in his suggestion that "Bartleby had been a subordinate clerk in the Dead Letter Office at Washington, from which he had been suddenly removed by a change in the administration."

Melville had ample opportunity to know a great deal about Henry Thoreau and his various experiments in individualism and in depending on himself. He read some of Thoreau's writing: probably he read the three instalments of "A Yankee in Canada," which early in 1853 appeared in *Putnam's Magazine*, the magazine in which "Bartleby" appeared in November of that year. In "Bartleby" he paid his respects to the kind of social attitude represented by Thoreau's two-year "hermitage" by Walden Pond, by his note of withdrawal from organized society, by his

refusal to pay his taxes, by his acceptance of a situation in which he lived at the expense of another man, permitting another's paying of his taxes to keep him from jail. "Bartleby" indeed is interesting as a story. It is also interesting as a revelation of Melville's mind and method of writing during 1853. It is an important clue pointing toward Melville's wholesome sanity, his objective searching of social relationships, his active interest in his contemporaries and their writings. In "Bartleby" we see him looking outward, not in any spirit of despairing rebellion searching his own heart.

# ***“Cock-A-Doodle-Doo!”***

## ***and***

# ***Transcendental***

# ***Hocus-Pocus***

“**C**OCK-A-Doodle-Doo!” is a satire on the buoyant transcendental principles which Melville heard echoing and re-echoing in the New England hills, especially those emanating from Concord, and, more particularly, a passage from *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* by Henry David Thoreau. The story goes with “Bartleby” as a companion piece. The two short stories are all that Melville published in 1853; and they appeared simultaneously in different magazines. In “Bartleby” the principle of self-reliance, the complete individualism of turning inwardly upon oneself and withdrawing from the obligations and associations of the outward world, is considered and exposed as leading only to the negation of death. “Cock-A-Doodle-Doo!” explores the outward-turning transcendent reaches of that doctrine which would put itself in tune with the infinite, even to the fateful disregard of the individual’s physical need. This kind of withdrawing into the evanescent, too, ends in the negation of the grave. The two stories thus complement each other as they reduce to the ultimate extreme of ridiculousness the antithetical extremes of transcendentalism.

The structure of “Cock-A-Doodle-Doo!” is simple, though the symbols do not always yield pliantly to the demands of the narrative. The story is told in the first person, the narrator being in effect Melville himself and the environment being that of Arrowhead, in the Berkshires. The time of the story is early

spring, and Melville probably wrote much of the descriptive coloring with an eye on the hillsides around him. The interest of the narrator in walking over the hills, the pressure of debt upon him, the mortgage on his farm, the narrator's reading *Tristram Shandy* and *The Anatomy of Melancholy*—all of these circumstances fit the outward facts of Melville's life at this time. The symbolism of the story is adapted to the circumstances of his own life.

The story opens with the narrator going on an early-morning, before-breakfast walk. It was a cool, misty morning; the country looked underdone; the river was covered with a low-hanging fever-and-agueish mist. It was a miserable world and the narrator's thoughts turned to train wrecks, steamboat explosions, thwarted revolutions of oppressed peoples, and "that smaller dunning fiend, my creditor." They say money is plentiful, but he has none. Scarlet fever and measles are rife among the workmen's hovels. The calves on the hillside are mangy like worn hair-trunks and "all quilted with a strange stuff dried on their flanks like layers of pancakes."

But hark! What's that? A triumphant thanksgiving of a cock-crow! "*Glory be to God in the highest!*" That is what the crowing cock says. It plainly says—"Never say die!"

The narrator is direct in speaking of the effect of the crowing: "Why, why, I begin to feel a little in sorts again. It ain't so very misty, after all." He returns home to breakfast with a hearty appetite, to drink brown stout and eat beefsteak. He laughs over *Tristram Shandy* and throws his insolent creditor out of doors. The crowing cock approves this treatment of the creditor by a trumpet-blast of triumph, a perfect paean and *laudamus*. The cock crew its triumphant note all day, in the morning, at noon, and at night. The narrator, after his evening walk, hearing the still-triumphant bell-note crowing, thought over his debts and other troubles

with a calm good-natured rapture of defiance, which astounded myself. I felt as though I could meet Death, and invite him to dinner, and toast the Catacombs with him, in pure overflow of self-reliance and a sense of universal security.

In succeeding days and weeks he went to seek the cock with intent to buy it; but at first he could get no track of it, other

than its crowing, which seemed always to come "out of the east." If his woes settled on him threateningly, one crow of the cock reverberating on the hills would make a crowing chanticleer of his soul. The dun brought suit: unworried, he clapped another mortgage on his farm. The cock crowed its triumphant approval.

A sad-faced, solemn woodchopper, a Marylander named Merrymusk, had sawed and split the narrator's wood in March, a silent, uncomplaining man who worked in wet or snow and ate his cold lunch in the cold. When the narrator went to Merrymusk's shanty to pay him, there he found the crowing cock, which he had named in his own mind Signor Beneventano, but which Merrymusk called Trumpet. Though the narrator offered five hundred dollars for the marvelous cock, Merrymusk scorned any offer. Dressed in tatters, living on a dirt floor, having a sick—yes, even dying—wife and four children, nevertheless he called himself rich in the possession of his cock, Trumpet. "Don't the cock *I* own glorify this otherwise inglorious, lean, lantern-jawed land? Didn't *my* cock encourage *you*?"

Merrymusk, the pale, thin wife, the four pale, thin children, whose "wasted eyes gazed at him with a wild and spiritual delight,"<sup>1</sup> all died, while Trumpet crowed his triumphant crows. The cock flew upon the apex of the shanty, spread wide his wings, sounded his supernatural note, and dropped dead. The narrator buried the family—and the cock,—erecting a gravestone "with a lusty cock in the act of crowing, chiselled on it, with the words beneath:—

'O death, where is thy sting?

O grave, where is thy victory?"

The narrator ended the story, saying,

I buried them, and planted the stone, which was a stone made to order; and never since then have I felt the doleful dumps, but under all circumstances crow late and early with a continual crow.

"Cock-a-doodle-doo! -oo! -oo! -oo! -oo!"

This story of course is symbolical, but the intent of the symbols and the satirical depth of the fable are only apparent as

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1. One who has told fairy stories to children will recognize the familiar marks of the generalized tale in the woodchopper and his family, even including the marvelous cock.

it is read in the light of a passage in Thoreau, which Melville certainly had before him as he wrote of his crowing cock. Melville had borrowed a copy of *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* from Evert Duyckinck in 1849 and he was to use it in some detail in writing of Winsome and Egbert and transcendental friendship in *The Confidence-Man*. Thoreau's experiment in living as an individual withdrawn from society, and especially his essay now called "Civil Disobedience," were used as a basis for "Bartleby." The source for the story "Cock-A-Doodle-Do!" comes by satirical extension from a brief passage in the middle of "Monday," in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, in which Thoreau discussed the Laws of Menu [Manu]. Melville fused this suggestion derived from Thoreau's writing with his own circumstance and environment and extended them into a *reductio ad absurdum* of the transcendental disregard of materialism.

Undoubtedly Melville found much in Thoreau to interest him as his repeated reading of the small amount of Thoreau's work which was published would indicate. From Hawthorne, Mrs. Hawthorne, and Elizabeth Peabody he had opportunity for familiarity with Thoreau's ideas extending beyond anything available in print. Sometime during the winter of 1852-1853 he was in Concord visiting Hawthorne. He discussed the Agatha story on that occasion and possibly refreshed his interest in Thoreau. In writing both "Bartleby" and "Cock-A-Doodle-Do!," comprising all of his published work for 1853, he took from Thoreau's pages the broader plan of each story and many particular details. Thoreau thus furnished him the basis of his satirical criticism of transcendental ideas.

A considerable part of "Monday" of the *Week* is taken up with discussion of India, its philosophy, literature, religion. Thoreau broke in upon such reflection on the Oriental mind to detail some of the local color of the river; but he hastened to get back to his subject: "Still had India, and that old noontide philosophy, the better part of our thoughts." He mentioned several books and commended the wisdom which the wise may find in them: "One of the most attractive of those ancient books that I have met with is the Laws of Menu." This book receives the full tide of Thoreau's enthusiasm.



I know of no book [he wrote] which has come down to us with grander pretensions than this, and it is so impersonal and sincere that it is never offensive nor ridiculous . It seems to have been uttered from some eastern summit, with a sober morning prescience in the dawn of time, and you cannot read a sentence without being elevated as upon the table-land of the Ghauts.

Melville's imagination did not have to go very far to carry over this figure to that of the knowing and triumphant crowing cock. Here is the uttered wisdom on an eastern summit, the morning prescience, the dawn, and the elevating effect of the uttered word. Thoreau's passage also contained the basis for the transition to the crowing cock: "As our domestic fowls are said to have their original in the wild pheasant of India, so our domestic thoughts have their prototypes in the thoughts of her philosophers." The woodcutters, too, were referred to when Thoreau thought of the ancient pine forests which had been felled.

The Laws of Menu, sounding as it were from some eastern-dawn-of-time summit with a voice of wisdom and elevating the hearer in mind and soul, became the noble cock Beneventano, alias Trumpet, sounding his clarion call in the Berkshires, driving off the dumps and elevating the soul of the hearer. Many of the further details of Thoreau's passage are paralleled in Melville's story. Thoreau is more enthusiastic and superlative in this passage than is customary with him. The Laws of Menu, he wrote,

has such a rhythm as the winds of the desert, such a tide as the Ganges, and is as superior to criticism as the Himmaleh mountains. Its tone is of such unrelaxed fibre, that even at this late day, unworn by time, . its fixed sentences keep up their distant fires still like the stars, by whose dissipated rays this lower world is illumined.

Melville used various devices to emphasize even to absurdity the tone and rhythm and superlative quality of the cock's crow ; but exclamations predominate.

How clear! How musical! how prolonged!

...a cry like a very laureate...

...such clamorously-victorious tones...

Why, this is equal to hearing the great bell of St. Paul's rung at a coronation!

...so smooth and flute-like...

...so vast, mounting, swelling, soaring...

such an oriental trophy, such a Great Bell of St Paul's swung  
in a cock's throat

like a full orchestra of the cocks of all nations ..

The extremity of Thoreau's figures lead Melville into passages of sheer burlesque, too, on the greatness of the cock. He thinks of its marvelous voice coming from somewhere indefinitely out of the east.

Oh, noble cock, where are you? Crow once more, my Bantam!  
my princely, my imperial Shanghai! my bird of the Emperor of China!  
Brother of the Sun! Cousin of great Jove! where are you?

It is probable that Melville, with his tongue very far in his cheek, addressed a passage or two quite directly to Thoreau in ironical reference to the enthusiasm of his passage. The narrator on the hillside having heard the voice out of the east, said,

"My friends, it is extraordinary, is it not?"

Unwittingly, I found that I had been addressing the two-year-olds—the calves—in my enthusiasm, which shows how one's true nature will betray itself at times in the most unconscious way.

The cock crew again and again. The calves scampered and capered in the field.

Bless me—it makes my blood bound—I feel wild. What? jumping on this rotten old log here, to flap my elbows and crow too! ..And all this from the simple crow of a cock Marvellous cock!

Thoreau wrote of the way the Laws of Menu brightens the mornings and the evenings, and makes such an impression on us over night as to awaken us before dawn, and its influence lingers around us like a fragrance late into the day.

Melville followed the lead in each of these four points, even adding the noontime to the list. The cock crew lustily in the morning, but "let's see how he'll crow about noon, and toward nightfall." There is no doubt about the high quality of his noontide crow:

His sunrise crow was a whisper to it. It was the loudest, longest, and most strangely musical crow that ever amazed mortal man.. so smooth and flute-like in its very clamour, so self-possessed in its very rapture of exultation; so vast, mounting, swelling, soaring, as if spurted out from a golden throat thrown far back.

Its evening crow too was a Vespers or curfew. It went out "all over the land and inhabited it... victorious over the entire day...." Its influence lingered over the land, for the cock went to roost "bequeathing the echoes of his thousand crows to night."

The influence of this wonder-worker from the eastern summit is operative early in the morning, too.

After an unwontedly sound, refreshing sleep I rose early, feeling like a carriage-spring—light, elliptical, airy, buoyant as sturgeon-nose—and, like a football, bounded up the hill.

The cock was up before him, its influence still radiant.

Thoreau had a paradoxical comment on The Laws being both public and private. His wording and the turn Melville gave to it are both interesting examples of the individuality of the men. Melville turned the thought back to the quality of Thoreau's privacy which he satirized in "Bartleby."

This of Menu [wrote Thoreau] addresses our privacy more than most. It is a more private and familiar, and, at the same time, a more public and universal word than is spoken in parlor or pulpit now-a-days.

Melville's cock joined in no roosters' chorus. He was solitary and independent:

From the scattered farm-houses a multitude of other cocks were crowing, and replying to each other's crows. But they were as flag-folets to a trombone. Shanghai would suddenly break in, and overwhelm all their crows with his one domineering blast. He seemed to have nothing to do with any other concern. He replied to no other crow, but crowed solely by himself, on his own account, in solitary scorn and independence.

This comment might have been Melville's thrust at Thoreau himself as much as an extension and satire of Thoreau's sentence on Menu.

Thoreau emphasized the ageless wisdom of the Indian philosopher's work and Melville considered also that aspect of the cock's crow. Thoreau wrote,

The sentences open...as the petals of a flower, yet they sometimes startle us with that rare kind of wisdom which could only have been learned from...experience....They are clean and dry as fossil truths which have been exposed to the elements for thousands of year....

This aged quality and wisdom was set off by Melville as being opposite to any "young sophomorean cock, who knew not the world." The crow was not one of wretched ignorance.

It was the crow of a cock who crowed not without advice; the crow of a cock who knew a thing or two; the crow of a cock who had fought the world and got the better of it, and was now resolved to crow, though the earth should heave and the heavens should fall. It was a wise crow; an invincible crow; a philosophic crow; a crow of all crows.

This remarkable crow had an effect on nature, the sunshine and the meadow. These details follow the lead of Thoreau's enthusiasm. He wrote that the Laws of Menu "helps the sun to shine" and "conveys a new gloss to the meadows and the depth of the wood." When the narrator of Melville's story heard the cock crow for the first time he noticed this immediate improvement in nature. "It ain't so very misty, after all. The sun yonder is beginning to show himself. I feel warmer." The narrator spoke of the new brightness of the country, mentioning the meadows, the new grass, the rejoicing sunlight, the warm verdure. But he added a burlesque note, too, to that idea of the interrelationship between the spiritual and the physical. Certainly Melville was using broad caricature when he wrote: "Even the crows cawed with a certain unction, and seemed a shade or two less black than usual." Both Thoreau and Melville wrote of the unusualness of the sound carrying so far. Thoreau was, of course, being figurative and twisting his thought into an extraordinary pattern.

It is wonderful that this sound should have come down to us from so far, when the voice of man can be heard so little way, and we are not now within ear-shot of any contemporary.

Melville more literally discussed the distance the cock-crow might carry in the clear mountain air. It echoed and reechoed on the mountains until it overran the country. "Now I plainly perceived how it was I had chanced to hear the gladdening sound on my distant hill."

Thoreau has an innocent sentence which sent Melville into an extreme of caricature: "The whole book by noble gestures and inclinations seems to render many words unnecessary." The idea of *noble gestures* in the cock was a thought which Melville could not treat with restraint.

A cock, more like a field-marshal than a cock. A cock, more like Lord Nelson with all his glittering arms on, standing on the *Vanguard's* quarter-deck going into battle, than a cock .

He was of a haughty size, stood haughtily on his haughty legs... He walked in front of the shanty, like a peer of the realm; his crest lifted, his chest heaved out, his embroidered trappings flashing in the light. His pace was wonderful. He looked like some noble foreigner. He looked like some Oriental king in some magnificent Italian opera.

Thoreau wrote that the Laws of Menu "has relation to the dim mountain line, and is native and aboriginal there." The

cock too is heard on the mountains, is echoed from the mountains, and Merrymusk said, "It chipped the shell here. I raised it." While Thoreau wrote, "The woodcutters have here felled an ancient pine forest . . ." Melville has, "It might have raised the ghosts of all the pines and hemlocks ever cut down in that country."

Melville took the germ of this story and many of the details to develop it from Thoreau's enthusiastic endorsement of the Laws of Menu. But Melville developed his symbols and his fable with an elaborate satire freely borrowing, caricaturing, and burlesqueing.

This story is one of the lightest in touch which Melville wrote. It contains puns and humor, both straightforward and ironical; though, undoubtedly, too, it shows marks of the author's physical, emotional, and financial stress. His creditors were indeed shoved in between him and salvation. Though money might have been plentiful, he had none of it. He undoubtedly did feel more than a twinge of melancholy and think, with a wry grin:

Here I am, as good a fellow as ever lived—hospitable—open-hearted—generous to a fault: and the Fates forbid that I should possess the fortune to bless the country with my bounteousness

But, though twinges of rheumatism and dyspepsia did beset him, this story, with its satire upon transcendental hocus-pocus, is witty and penetrating. There are no idle guffaws here, but there are some excellent passages of humor both delightful and far-reaching in implication, such as the observation on the rooster which goes into the Sunday pot:

Yes, yes; even cocks have to succumb to the universal spell of tribulation: jubilant in the beginning, but down in the mouth at the end.

The narrator of the story asserts repeatedly that the sound of the cock restored his flagging spirits.

If at times I would relapse into my doleful dumps [he said] straight-way at the sound of the exultant and defiant crow, my soul, too, would turn chanticleer and clap her wings, and throw back her throat, and breathe forth a cheerful challenge to all the world of woes.

Whenever the hard world seemed pressing in on him, the clarion sound came from the eastern summit. "Ye gods, how it set me up again! Right on my pins! Yea, verily on stilts!"

The cock seemed to speak plainly to him in direct language. "Let the world and all aboard of it go to pot." These seemed to be the cock's words. "Do you be jolly, and never say die. What's the world compared to you?"

The narrator thought, "Oh, noble cock!" But on second thought he had doubts of this doctrine. He raised questions:

"But my dear and glorious cock, .. one can't so easily send this world to pot; one can't so easily be jolly with civil-processes in his hat or hand."

This is Melville's answer compared to the doctrine of the glorious dawn-of-time truth which sounded with such a vital import that it helped the sun to shine and conveyed a new gloss to the meadows. One can't so easily send this world to pot. Melville was giving his answer to the question, "What's the world compared to you?" in "Bartleby." One cannot ignore the world and live. In "Cock-A-Doodle-Do!" as in "Bartleby" he came down to a particular example to test such a general principle as Thoreau's passage seemed to be setting forth. He presented the case of Merrymusk, the unfortunate Marylander, the wood-sawyer of solemn disposition and the mind of Solomon. He owned the crowing cock, but even so his fate was not enviable. He had a wife and four children. The wife was an invalid; "one child had the white-swelling, and the rest were rickety." This family lived in a shanty by the railroad tracks. Merrymusk's cow had "died during an accouchement," and he had been unable to afford another.

The narrator, who had, under the prodding of the cock's insistent message, added mortgage upon mortgage on his farm, went to visit Merrymusk.

"It must be a doleful life, then, for all concerned This lonely solitude—this shanty—hard work—hard times."

"Haven't I Trumpet—He's the cheerer. He crows through all; crows at the darkest: Glory to God in the highest! Continually he crows it .

"Why call *me* poor? Don't the cock I own glorify this otherwise inglorious, lean, lantern-jawed land? Didn't *my* cock encourage *you*?"...

I returned home in a deep mood. I was not wholly at rest concerning the soundness of Merrymusk's views of things, though full of admiration for him.

The narrator on a second visit arrived in time to be present at the demise of the entire family. Merrymusk denied being ill, and died asserting that the family was well, shouting his conviction forth "in a kind of wild ecstasy of triumph over ill." The wife too immediately died. The cock outdid himself in triumphant crowing, springing upon the bed where the children lay.

He seemed bent upon crowing the souls of the children out of their wasted bodies. He seemed bent upon rejoining instantly this whole family in the upper air. The children seemed to second his endeavours. Far, deep, intense longings for release transfigured them into spirits before my eyes.

The cock itself flew to the shanty roof and, crowing one last supernatural note, dropped dead. The narrator buried them all and erected the monument bearing the sign of the crowing cock.

Thoreau wrote of the Laws of Menu :

Tried by a New England eye, or the mere practical wisdom of modern times, they are the oracles of a race already in its dotage, but held up to the sky, which is the only impartial and incorruptible ordeal, they are of a piece with its depth and serenity, and I am assured that they will have a place and significance as long as there is a sky to test them by.

Melville presented the crowing cock as mounting to the roof top and dying, "dropped at my feet." The answer he made to Thoreau was that all the family lay dead on that spot, under the sign of the crowing cock, "and I buried them."

In a memorable passage at the end of chapter eighty-five of *Moby-Dick*, Melville had written that he was a man who regarded both things earthly and things heavenly with equal eye. His answer to such mountain-top enthusiasm as Thoreau wrote in praise of the Laws of Menu was the long drawn out, ironical note with which he ended his story: "Cock-a-doodle-doo! -oo! -oo! -oo! -oo!"

# Melville's Tartarus

A FRIEND of mine who is a financial expert in the Boston business world once asked me about my teaching of American literature. "Do you," he inquired, "begin with Emily Dickinson and work from there downward, or do you work up to Emily Dickinson as a climax to your study?" Possibly this question penetrates further into this man's personal interest than into the techniques of teaching the survey of American literature courses; but the same question must always be asked and answered as one approaches the problem of teaching a class in Melville: Does one begin with *Moby-Dick* and work from there downward, or does one work up to *Moby-Dick* as a climax?

I have spoken on *Moby-Dick* to English literature students and faculty members on the Jumna and Ganges Rivers, who had never read *Moby-Dick* or heard of Melville, and to Rotarians in a mountainous tea plantation section of South India who requested this subject so that they might raise questions about the book that many of them did know. I have found student nurses in a hospital and tubercular patients in a sanitarium as well as college students from the survey courses to graduate level interested in getting into discussion concerning *Moby-Dick* and the intriguing and puzzling author of it and the many other lesser known and "inferior" works.

I myself was a graduate student before I ever consciously heard or came across the name of Herman Melville—this was many years ago—and one of the problems in approaching a class of senior and graduate students in a study of Melville is the unevenness of their acquaintance with him. Some have read widely in and about him while others know only that he wrote a long and forbidding book which they presumably somehow must now confront.

I have tried approaching Melville through *Typee* and a more



or less chronological approach, through *Moby-Dick* and a working backwards and forwards, and through the shorter narratives which followed *Pierre*. This latter approach, when I have some six weeks for a study of Melville with the students, has seemed to me the more satisfactory and effective.

Such short pieces as "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," "The Lightning-Rod Man," "The Fiddler," "I and My Chimney," "Jimmy Rose," and "The Bell-Tower" offer materials for raising in a preliminary way some of the major questions involved in the tantalizing mystery of Melville—which is the mystery of literature and the mystery of life. In the preliminary discussion, I like to focus on "The Tartarus of Maids," using "The Paradise of Bachelors" principally as a foil or contrast, as an obvious example of Melville's persistent method of confronting opposites.

The method I use is to ask questions, raise questions, and encourage general talk about this story. However, I try to keep the discussion channeled so that in the course of it at least three master aspects of the subject shall have had some consideration. In the first place (although not necessarily in this order, or even in any systematic arrangement), is this a good story? Is it in any way worthy of a major author? Does it have any marks of either talent of a high order or genius? In the second place, what does this story reveal of Melville's imagination? What do we find in it of the real naked essence of his vision? Is there in it any significant human awareness, any understanding of life's possibilities, either missed or achieved? In the third place, can we see in this story any of the essential Melville? Does it carry the essential quality, the individuality of this author?

One of the first reactions of many students to "The Tartarus of Maids" is that it is a striking, obvious, and yet strange social protest against the machine and the enslavement of man to the machine—or, in this instance, woman. This is a subject of considerable interest, and I may have at hand two or three published critical pronouncements to give point and direction to this phase of the discussion. For instance, Ronald Mason (*The Spirit Above the Dust*, London, 1951, p. 196) wrote of "The Tartarus of Maids" as "a bitter little descriptive essay on the indignity of mass labour, icy and indifferent."

Or, Leon Howard (*Herman Melville*, London and Berkeley, 1958, p. 218) called it "a description of a visit to a paper mill, critical enough of the boasted New England industrial system to be sharp...."

This question of the story's criticism of the industrial practices of the day could well lead to a consideration of what Melville has to say about man and his labors, even in comparison with Thoreau's view that one could well labor one day out of seven; for Melville has much to say in many of his volumes about labor in the Eden of the South Seas to labor in Liverpool. But a more profitable consideration turns on the artistic handling of the machine image in this story. Consider the girls against the machines and the transposition involved in the implication that the machines have life while the girls become mechanical robots, enslaved and lifeless. Following out the imagery of cold and whiteness of the exterior and the paleness of the operatives brings in a contrast with warmth and redness, also.

But, furthermore, the students will raise the question of the names (Woedolor, Blood River, Cupid) and of the machine (nine minutes) and of the pulpy mass being formed into fools-cap, unlined, with the reference to Locke. The entire sex imagery of this story with piston motion, vats, pulp, development or gestation, delivery, cord and all, will alert students to read Melville with attention to an imaginative level.

Is this story more about woman and her place or problem than it is about the problem of industry and industrial labor? The Melville's fourth child was born just before this story was published. The four children appeared at regular intervals, in 1849, 1851, 1853, 1855. The inexorable processes of human reproduction and the necessity and regularity lying beyond human control and binding mankind, but especially women, to the wheels of reproductive necessity is involved in the mechanical imagery of the paper-making machine, while Cupid lightheartedly roves at large. This story emphasizes virgins and spinsters, too, as well as the reproductive machine, and there had been around Melville for several years before he wrote this story a kind of woman's world. Especially was his sister Augusta, who did much of the preparation of his manuscripts for him, a spinster, close to him.

Opposing the spinster idea is the bachelor concept. "The

Paradise of Bachelors" is at hand for comparison, and Melville himself draws several direct contrasts. But in the works of Melville the bachelor idea occurs repeatedly and significantly, in Typee valley, among the ships of *Moby-Dick*, in the allegory of *Mardi*, and in *The Confidence-Man*. The bachelor is never mature or seasoned or whole, but is usually innocent and care-free. The basic allegory of withdrawal from the city of London into the lighthearted paradise of the bonvivants in "The Paradise of Bachelors" is representative of Melville's frequent use.

Can the student who considers the complexity of interrelated materials in this minor piece of Melville's have doubts about the entire complexity of his imaginative vision? The student who reflects on and traces out some of the imagery, the allegory, and the implications of this story will be better ready to undertake a serious reading of *Mardi*, *The Confidence-Man*, or *Pierre*, not to mention *Billy Budd*, *Moby-Dick*, or *Clarel*.

Beyond the considerations suggested in the subject materials of this story lie the problems of its artistic quality and achievement. The story does not have much bulk, but it does have a violence and intensity of phrasing, reference, and imagery. The title at once takes us into the depths of Dante and the second paragraph enters the forbidding gateway of the Inferno. *Woodolor*, *violent Gulf Stream*, *crazy spinster's hut*, and *Mad Maid's Bellows-pipe* greet us in the first short paragraph. We are among Plutonian mountains and amidst whited sepulchres as Melville rapidly moves us into this imaginative creation of cold and wind and wonder where "the gust shrieked through the shivered pass, as if laden with lost spirits bound to the unhappy world."

One of the accompanying factors of the emotional intensity is the highly patterned prose, as in the sentence just quoted. Melville began one series of striking sentences, descriptive of the arrival of the narrator at the exterior of the paper mill, with such a varied and controlled use of verbal repetition as would be found in the better poems of Poe:

Piercingly and shrilly the shotted blast blew by the corner; and redly and demoniacally boiled Blood River at one side.

The highly alliterative and tonal passage moves the reader into the whirling depths of Dante's frozen inferno—or Melville's. The intent through artistically used language to deepen and

extend one's perceptive awareness is a part of Melville's necessity in bringing the complex magnitude of his vision into the compass of a magazine story. He uses repetition in a daringly effective manner and in a variety of ways. Words are repeated and, through repetition, grow and extend their meanings.

"At rows of blank-looking counters sat rows of blank-looking girls, with blank, white folders in their blank hands, all blankly folding blank paper." If this were all, and if Melville did nothing with it, it would be a kind of immature virtuosity, designed merely to surprise and amuse. But Melville does not stop here—or begin here. We have, before the introduction of this one-sentence paragraph using the word *blank* in some way six times, the blank outer world of the snow and cold and the whited sepulchre appearance of the mill itself and the blankness, paleness, or whiteness of the cheeks of the narrator, the faces of the girls, the paper, the walls, the windows.

Following the paragraph is a rapid movement of idea and image as we have sketched in the iron animal with rising and falling piston, before which stands a tall girl with pallid cheek, feeding it, while another girl withdraws the paper upon which the machine has made its impress. It makes its mark also upon the girls, as Melville demonstrates in a quick sentence. We switch our glance to a second iron animal, with other servers, all in a mechanical rhythm and amidst a strange silence—for we are accustomed to associate noise with machines.

Not a syllable was breathed. Nothing was heard but the low, steady overruling hum of the iron animals. The human voice was banished from the spot. Machinery—that vaunted slave of humanity—here stood menially served by human beings, who served mutely and cringingly as the slave serves the Sultan.

Thus the idea of blankness enters into the vision of life, the life of these operatives, and, if the story has implication beyond the social surface, the life of bound and slavish mankind. The blank lives are realized through a highly concentrated and controlled application of the art of language. It is the winter, without the spring, of *Walden*.

Richard Chase (*Herman Melville*, N.Y., 1949, p. 160) has commented on the achieved art of this story, as well as on some flaws in the "monstrous" symbols: "The approach to the mountain

is expressed in kinaesthetic and visual imagery appropriate to the mythical identification of the body with the landscape."

It may be a reflection upon the teaching of literature to note that the student beginning graduate study usually feels a familiarity with the "idea" material of a story while he will doubt his ability to comment on the "style" of the story. But this story offers an excellent opportunity for a consideration of the elements of style and their effective or ineffective application. Do language, image, incident, and character (or life) support and develop each other into the author's deepest vision?

A further consideration for a class of beginning graduate students in this study is an evaluation of the various critical materials available. Over the past fifty years a considerable number of brief or slightly more extended critical comments pertinent to this story have been made. It will be for the student both revealing and, I think, encouraging to find a considerable disagreement in judgment among the scholars who have written on this part of Melville's work. Some other short stories, too, offer good experience in evaluating critical materials.

I have not, in this brief note, explored the pedagogical advantages of a comparison of this story with a Hawthorne story, say, "Young Goodman Brown," for a study in contrast of imagery and idea, but in my conducting of the class I do want Hawthorne and some of his familiar stories to be a present part of the discussion. I have, here, too, written only of the beginnings of the exploratory excursion which the students and I take together into the works of Melville.

I speak not so much for the students as for myself when I say that I am grateful for the profession which makes such a relationship in such a project possible. I have found the presence of Melville in the classroom as well as in my study a stimulation to fuller and richer awareness of life's dangers and darkness, but even more so of life's fullness and potential. I have found the *Tartarus* a good starting point. This story has presented an interesting opening for the student who has read widely in Melville as well as for the student approaching him for the first time. After this start no student is unacquainted with the complexity of what Melville will offer him in "those short, quick probings at the very axis of reality."

# *Herman Melville's Lightning-Rod Man*

ONE of Melville's slightest stories is a narrative relating how a lightning-rod salesman makes a professional call upon a householder during a thunderstorm. On the surface the story has little to attract attention except a few clever Melvillian turns of language and wit. But the story does have a curious and interesting relevance to Melville.

That lightning-rod man takes on a strange coloring of caricature, as though he were drawn with a few sharpened lines from a model who had earned Melville's disapproval. If the story is a satirical attack upon an arrogant man, it may show us Melville challenging one of the prominent defenders of orthodox Calvinism. The Rev. Mr. John Todd, minister of the First Christ Church (Congregational) of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, has many parallels to Melville's salesman as a means to avoid the divine thunderbolt.

Todd preached fire and brimstone and he knew his way was the one true way to be free from the danger of the everlasting pit. He preached heaven and hell and considered himself a follower of that great master theologian, Jonathan Edwards. Sin and depravity and atonement were to him essential elements of all preaching. On one occasion a girl attended an all-day preaching service of his and felt so keenly that he had been preaching particularly at her that she cut her throat. He repudiated all fellowship with unbelievers in the true and old-fashioned doctrines.

Todd acquired early that quality of intellectual and theological arrogance which invited Melville's attack. As a theological student he evaluated himself as the leading candidate for valedictorian. He knew that he would write the best sermon

because he was the greatest by nature, was original, had the most genius, thought the most strongly and powerfully, and had a mind on a stronger and deeper scale than the other students had.

He said (this was while he was still a student), that when he spoke the audience felt themselves under the control of a mighty spirit. Altogether he knew that he had the honor of being universally considered the first man in his class, and probably first in the seminary. This opinion, if held generally, was still not quite universal; for one of his professors felt that he had too bold, too independent feelings: that he lacked humility.

When he taught district school for a short time, he had a reputation for severe discipline and was even considered a terribly cruel man as he paced the schoolroom with his long ruler under his arm. Through his work as a minister he was often described as autocratic.

In his first parish in Groton he quarreled violently and continuously with the Unitarians. He said firmly: "I do believe that Unitarianism is not the Gospel of Christ.... Christ did not preach it; the apostles did not preach it; the redeemed in heaven do not celebrate it.... I do not believe that Jesus Christ will ever acknowledge it as his religion, or its ministers as his ministers; and I can not, therefore, acknowledge it as being the Gospel, or them as being the ministers of the Gospel." A neighbor of his, probably a Unitarian, named a pig after him. The neighbor would delight in calling the pig in a loud voice, "Todd, Todd," and the pig knew its name. Todd in his own wryly humorous way got his personal satisfaction by remarking that the pig was the likeliest member of the neighbor's family.

Todd was called to be the minister of the newly organized First Congregational Church in Philadelphia. He was installed in office in 1836 and preached the sermon dedicating a new church building on November 11, 1837. That sermon, *Principles and Results of Congregationalism*, published in pamphlet form, brought down upon Todd a howl of rage at the arrogance of his assumption that his church was the one best church. His pastorate in Philadelphia was a short one and no one—not even he—could think of it as brilliant or successful.

Todd had been minister to First Christ Church of Pittsfield for a dozen years and he and Melville had been fellow citizens

of the town for five years when *The Lightning-Rod Man* was published in *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, August, 1854.

Melville pictures a little episode of a lightning-rod salesman calling upon a householder during a lightning storm in which the thunder rolls and roars around the two men while they talk—the salesman about averting divine fire, fearfully, insistently, and with a confident arrogance that he has the one true way; the householder nonchalantly and banteringly, and yet with an irritated opposition to the implied absolutism of the other.

Melville through his indirect approach has some comments to make on religion. The mysterious *double entendre*, the quip, and the paradoxical situation which are parts of Melville's manner have a free play in this slight narrative, partly because of the slightness of action or characterization. There is little framework toward which the materials must be bent and the writer, with his many-pronged, probing suggestions, can hint and suggest here where he does not need to follow through.

One at this distance can only guess at what might have been the relationship between the Rev. Mr. Todd and Herman Melville, but it is certain from their characters and the qualities of mind which each evidenced that they would very easily have struck fire from each other over many issues.

Melville's *Typee* and *Omoo* were sharply critical of the missionary activities of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, an agency in which Todd was actively interested. He was for several years a nationally known leader among the Congregational churches, serving in various offices and twice in his church at Pittsfield being host to the national assemblies. He was known in the whole Berkshire region as a kind of bishop, because, among other reasons, says a contemporary commentator, of "his unconscious tendency to push to the front and take the lead, from sheer weight and energy of character. There was scarcely a convention or anniversary, a dedication or an installation, or a meeting or gathering of any kind, secular or religious, which did not demand his presence."

A neighbor and friend of Melville's, Mrs. Morewood, has given us a little glimpse of the literary giant who had just written *Moby-Dick* and *Pierre*, an indication of the quality of conflict which might have resulted from any attempt of the two Pittsfield



celebrities, Melville and Todd, 'to speak together on religious topics:

Mr. Herman [Melville] was more quiet than usual—still he is a pleasant companion at all times and I like him very much—Mr Morewood now that he knows him better likes him the more—still he dislikes many of Mr Herman's opinions and religious views—It is a pity that Mr Melville so often in conversation uses irreverent language—he will not be popular in society here on that very account—

There is one further point beyond the personal qualities of Todd and Melville which suggests for this story a local origin—lightning not only struck the great elm tree in the Pittsfield park on two separate occasions but it also struck the Congregational Church of which Todd was the minister (but before his pastorate there) in a spectacular display at a time when the church was occupied by about three hundred persons. The thunderer displayed his ability to hurl the fiery bolts in the vicinity where protection from divine anger was the theological theme.

On Sunday evening September 6, 1835, while a prayer meeting was in session in the lecture room of the Congregational Church, lightning struck. The lightning rod had become detached from the building and swung loose, a situation similar to one commented on in Melville's story, where the salesman asserts that the workman who installed the rod was at fault—not the rod itself.

The lightning, avoiding the defective rod, entered the lecture-room between the first and second windows, carrying in the second window, to the large stove, followed the pipe to the chimney at the west end of the house, descended it until it met the stovepipe in the lower room, thence followed the pipe north to the stove in the north-west lower room, where it tore its way through the floor, and passed out through the underpinning; leaving a visible trace of its irresistible course in the earth outside, and at the north-west corner of the building.

It was a wonderful and awesome display of fiery power before the frightened eyes of the three hundred worshippers, several of whom were severely injured. No one was killed.

This lightning-struck building of First Christ Church burned on January 9, 1851. The Melvilles, a prominent family and but recently established on the beautiful estate which Melville named *Arrowhead*, were undoubtedly solicited—as were all families in

Pittsfield considered able and willing to contribute—for funds to erect the stone building which replaced it.

Whatever an occasion might have been for a meeting of Todd and Melville—or whether such a meeting with any fiery remarks being exchanged over lightning or divine wrath ever took place, Melville wrote his lightning rod story with a pertinence of comment and an immediacy of suggestion which make it applicable to Todd and his situation, as it also has a more general application to innumerable other situations and to the differences between the more skeptical mind and a particular kind of religious belief

Melville's approach caricatures the believer. The salesman is himself both very fearful and very positive. He has a kind of wild and arrogant ignorance which can assert that "this one spot. . . where I stand" is the place to be safe from the thunderbolts of divine anger. His approach to safety is largely negative.

I avoid pine-trees, high houses, lonely barns, upland pastures, running water, flocks of cattle and sheep, a crowd of men. If I travel on foot—as to-day—I do not walk fast, if in my buggy, I touch not its back or sides, if on horseback, I dismount and lead the horse. But of all things I avoid tall men

This latter would be to Melville the epitome of littleness. He writes figuratively and with double meanings in such a way that "deep diving" men and "tall" men would suggest those unafraid of intellectual quest. This fearful, positive-negative salesman of lightning rods receives Melville's vigorously ironic thrusts. The salesman talks with assurance of the nature of lightning and its habits as well as the places and times and means of avoiding it (getting wet, or baptism, helps); but at the same time his manner and his words as well give him a paltry and cowardly character in contrast to the householder who is not certain—except that he will not "buy" the view presented to him.

The view of the householder is both good-natured and severe, inclined toward jest and yet thoroughly disapproving of such narrowness and displeased with such arrogance as are implied in the views of the salesman.

"You pretended envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary to and from Jupiter Tonans," laughed I; "you mere man who come

here to put you and your pipestem between clay and sky, do you think that because you can strike a bit of green light from the Leyden jar, that you can thoroughly avert the supreme bolt? Your rod rusts, or breaks, and where are you? Who has empowered you, you Tetzels, to peddle round your indulgences from divine ordinations? The hairs of our heads are numbered, and the days of our lives. In thunder as in sunshine, I stand at ease in the hands of my God. False negotiator, away! See, the scroll of the storm is rolled back, the house is unharmed; and in the blue heavens I read in the rainbow, that the Deity will not, of purpose, make war on man's earth." "Impious wretch!" foamed the stranger, blackening in the face as the rainbow beamed, "I will publish your infidel notions."

The scowl grew blacker on his face; the indigo-circles enlarged round his eyes as the storm-rings round the midnight moon. He sprang upon me; his tri-forked thung at my heart.

I seized it, I snapped it, I dashed it; I trod it; and dragging the dark lightning-king out of my door, flung his elbowed, copper sceptre after him.

But spite of my treatment and spite of my dissuasive talk of him to my neighbors, the Lightning-rod man still dwells in the land, still travels in storm-time, and drives a brave trade with the fears of men.

That Melville often used incidents from his own experience or his immediate observation as a starting point for his creative work is commonplace observation. It is, of course, not certain that the lightning rod salesman is a character derived either immediately or remotely from the Rev. Mr. John Todd, but the relevance and similarity of situations suggest this little narrative as an example of the method used by Melville as a writer. The story certainly is a *double entendre* comment, revealing of Melville and his own growing isolation. The last paragraph carries a weight of sadness in that personal isolation of Melville from his community. Mrs. Morewood mentioned his occasional irreverent talk among his neighbors which was disturbing to them. Melville might have said of himself, "In thunder as in sunshine, I stand at ease in the hands of my God," certainly an attitude which Todd, with his emphasis upon the theology of Jonathan Edwards, would not have approved; but he was separated from the many who disapproved of his vigorous questionings.

On the other hand, if Todd and the salesman can be related, the final sentence was entirely true and prophetic of Todd. Under his pastorate 1,008 persons were admitted to membership

in First Christ Church in Pittsfield. He baptized 502 persons—indications of “a brave trade.” He continued to serve the church for twenty years after the story was published. Toward the end of his pastorate he had a moment at the center of a great historic occasion—though it may be that the part he played was completely dwarfed by the magnitude of the event.

Todd took passage on the first transcontinental passenger train from Boston to San Francisco and was present at Promontory, Utah, when the final rails of the Union Pacific and Western Pacific railroads were brought together. No preparation had been made to have any religious observance of the event—even though champagne was at hand to bathe the cowcatchers of the two engines. At the last moment a search for a clergyman of distinction—or any clergyman—gave Todd the honor of uttering the invocation there where East and West met, the last rails being placed by pig-tailed China boys from the Celestial Empire.

Todd had a pig named for him at Groton; his dedicatory sermon to the first Congregational Church in Philadelphia unloosed a storm of disapproval; it may be that he unwittingly sat for a caricature in the work of such a great writer as Herman Melville: but there is no hint of disapproval of his invocation of divine blessing upon the first railroad to span the American continent. It would have been interesting to be present at a conversation between Todd and Melville in Pittsfield, but in the absence of such a possibility *The Lightning-Rod Man* offers an indication of what the situation might have been like.

# *To Light the Gay Bridals: One Aspect of Moby-Dick*

**S**TANDING solidly in the middle of the chapter in *Walden*, "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For," is Thoreau's assertion of faith in life and growth: "I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by a conscious endeavor."

This in the Romantic scheme of things is man's predicament. He is confronted with choice and direction, and which of the roads chosen makes all the difference. Light and life are opposed to darkness and death. Demeter must be forever won back from darkness and sterility to light and growth.

In *Walden*, and particularly in the chapters "Higher Laws" and "Spring," Thoreau gives striking expression to this juxtaposition of opposing elements and the necessity for man's choosing his direction. The "animal" in us awakens as our "higher nature" gives it opportunity; but "man flows at once to God when the channel of purity is open." The "lumpish grub" in man may translate itself and ascend in winged orbit. Thoreau's imagination saw in the spring flowering of the sand in the railroad cut the archetype of creative life triumphing over the forces of death. Beautiful and winged life may arise from dead wood. The waters of life may yet drown out the muskrats. Or, in transposed form, the forces of death may bring down the winged life; the muskrats may open the way for the waters of life to drain away. This sweep of romantic vision, in one form or another, pervades the Romantic Renaissance in America.

Melville had the same capacity for confronting opposites in compact juxtaposition. Shakespeare would "put an ass's head in Fairyland"; but Melville, picturing an ass drinking holy

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water, wrote of "the mysteries slobbered by an ass! and confronted Eden with Gethsemane.

In a mood of raillery Melville had Derwent scoff as the pilgrim party was approaching Bethlehem that they would

Follow the star on the tattooed man,  
We wise men here (Clarel, p. 412)

With less of irony and more of sadness the pilgrims had climbed the Mount of Olives, seen the footprint of Jesus, looked down over Jerusalem, and from this very place on hope's hill had seen in the distance the charnel waves of the Dead Sea, the Pit Despair. (Clarel, p. 118, 119)

The use of religious imagery and the sharp contrast between the ideal and the bleak surroundings of the Holy Land and the coarseness of life's experiences is naturally and inevitably a center of the poem *Clarel*; but the idealized vision in struggle with fact and experience, in some way common to the major American Romantic writers, was also fundamental to Melville's work and his imaginative creation. It is dominantly present in the imagery of *Moby-Dick*.

From the opening sentence of the novel to the Epilogue, from Ishmael to Job, scriptural impact and Christian idealism are part of the fabric of the book. Beyond the evocative quality of the proper names, the episodic echoes, and the allusions lie the Judao-Christian elements of ritual and custom, and the moral and spiritual tradition. *Moby-Dick* is richly tapestried in the minutiae of religious ceremony and experience inherent in Western culture, and its major framework is buttressed by its use of these elements.

Its shadows and darkness deepen in the greater light which this religious heritage brings into play. The burial and resurrection of Tashtego, the life-bearing quality of the coffin turned into lifebuoy, the allusive relationship of the tail of the whale to the God of Moses upon Mt. Sinai, who was visible only in his back parts, but indicate the diversity of traditional religious materials brought into imaginative play as Melville wrought out this masterpiece within the American Romantic tradition.

As the action of *Moby-Dick* gets under way, the first action in Ishmael's New Bedford week-end takes him into a church. The dark imagery of this episode is indicative of the contrasting antithetical elements involved in the religious ideal and the material

surroundings. The light is smoky, the building is low, the invitingly open door leads Ishmael into darkness. He stumbles over an ash-box, chokes on the rising dust, thinks of Gomorrah, and names the building he has entered, "The Trap." In the Negro church—for such it is—the black minister, "beating a book in a pulpit," was preaching on a text "about the blackness of darkness." Man in darkness still gropes for light.

Through reference to Lazarus and Dives and a comparison of New Bedford and Canaan, Melville leads to the Whaleman's Chapel, with its evidences of human mortality and its vision of Life and Death, and the hopeful chapter ending, "...and come a stove boat and stove body when they will, for stave my soul, Jove himself cannot." Melville reused the figure with which he had ended *White-Jacket*, but with a significant variation. Here in *Moby-Dick* the pulpit is added :

Yes, the world's a ship on its passage out, and not a voyage complete; and the pulpit is its prow.

Father Mapple's sermon is justly regarded by Melville readers as a memorable piece of writing. It is one of the great sermons of all literature, and it gives relevant body to the ambiguous paradox lying near the heart of man's uneasy predicament:

And if we obey God, we must disobey ourselves; and it is in this disobeying ourselves, wherein the hardness of obeying God consists.

Imbedded in Chapter LXIV, "Stubb's Supper," is a second sermon, shorter, dialectical, pointed. Old Fleece, the Negro cook, has been ordered to prepare a whale steak for Stubb. The sharks are busy with the whale at the ship's side. Stubb follows his playful impulse to urge Old Fleece to preach to the sharks, and the cook rather profanely and sullenly does as he is commanded, delivering a pertinent, illuminating Christian message:

Your woraciousness, fellow-critters, I don't blame ye so much for; dat is natur, and can't be helped; but to gobern dat wicked natur, dat is de pint. You is sharks, sartin; but if you govern de shark in you, why den you be angel...

Old Fleece continues with some humanitarian remarks, and he is commended by Stubb, "That's Christianity; go on." But Old Fleece observes that it is useless to preach to such gluttons. In the conversation Stubb advises the old Negro to go home and be born over again, and the cook, in his turn, mutters to himself that Stubb is more shark than the sharks are.

This concern for the conflicts between the forces of life and the forces of death is deeply embodied in *Moby-Dick*, as in the fleeting image called forth by the odor when the hold of the whaleship is broken open:

a savor is given forth somewhat similar to that arising from excavating an old city graveyard, for the foundations of a Lying-in Hospital. (Chr. XCII)

The irony of such a contrast is part of every reader's experience with Melville, but beyond the irony is the indication that from the boneyard is arising the maternity shelter, and roughly, in the image of Ezekiel, the dry bones are made to live.

In a more extended and more vividly impressive episode, in Chapter LXXXI, "The Pequod Meets the Virgin," Melville probes into the contrast and conflict inherent in Christian tradition and Western civilization. The chapter opens with the captain of the *Jungfrau*, The Virgin, coming to the Pequod hat in hand begging for oil. The Virgin's lamp is empty, and the Virgin has not yet entered the lists of the successful participants in the business of killing whales.

This chapter, one of the longer ones in the novel, describes the sighting, pursuit, killing, and final loss of a crippled old bull whale. In the pursuit of the whale the Pequod boats nose out those of the Virgin and get fast. The old, encrusted, misformed, terrified victim is described in sympathetic detail. The word *pitiabile* is used half a dozen times. Christmas is referred to and *Job* is quoted.

The vast gentle beauty of the sea, in its eternal blue noon of silent serenity is contrasted with the agony of the monster of the deep writhing and wrenching in painful anguish.

The old whale finally surfaces and Melville thrusts his ironic contrast:

But pity there was none. For all his old age, and his one arm, and his blind eyes, he must die the death and be murdered, in order to light the gay bridals and other merrymakings of men, and also to illuminate the solemn churches that preach unconditional inoffensiveness by all to all.

The old whale, killed and brought alongside the Pequod, finally sinks without giving up any of its oil. At the end of the chapter The Virgin, still a virgin in the whale fishery, is futilely vanishing in the distance in pursuit of the uncapturable.



But this vigorous image highlighted in the middle of this killing of the old whale still remains. The account of the pursuit and destruction of this whale is presented in a way to give the sharpest point to the contrast. Without pity, Flask even thrusts his dart into an ulcerous growth, the size of a bushel, goading the suffering whale to a frenzy. The peaceful beauty of nature, represented in the sea, the ruthless pursuit and cruelty of the men, and the fear and suffering frenzy of the leviathan are juxtaposed and held suspended. Melville uses examples of the Homeric figure in detailing the scene. He uses such materials as allusion to "noblest oaks" and "Xerxes' army" to bestow antiquity and dignity on his subject.

The solemn ritual to which Melville turns for his image is the blessing of the family relation. The gay bridal is given the focal center by the multiple meanings of The Virgin, the vessel without oil, and the allusion to the Biblical parable.

The death of the whale may be pitiless and cruel, as one part of the ambiguous contrast, but the oil does bring light to gay bridals, to life, and to the ideal of unconditional inoffensiveness preached in solemn churches as the antithetical representation of man's ceaseless pursuit of the ideal.

Nowhere else in *Moby-Dick*, and probably nowhere else in the works of Melville, are the conflict and the contrast between the creative processes of life and the destructive aspects of those forces of material and practical life brought into sharper and more significantly meaningful terms than in the briefly presented episode of "The Cassock," Chapter XCV. Life and the creative forces for life are brought to destruction and used in the processes of death and destruction under the ministration of the ceremonial cassock.

The bull whale killed by Stubb's crew has been brought alongside the Pequod and has undergone the dismembering process. At a certain juncture in this cutting-up operation, Melville wrote, one would have observed a surprising object, the great six-foot black cone, the grandissimus of the bull whale. Melville introduced the subject with some comparisons of its wonder-producing power with the other awe-inspiring aspects of the sperm whale, its head, its jaw, its tail. The cone in size is like a tall

Kentuckian. Its ritual and idol quality are evoked by reference to the Book of Kings and the experience of Queen Maachah.

The cone, as it is called to the attention of the reader, is lying in the scuppers, in the gutter of the deck, amidst the filth of the butchering process. The mincer, assisted by two aides, carries it off "as if he were a grenadier carrying a dead comrade from the field." The skin of the cone is removed. It is stretched, dried, fitted, cut with holes for arms and head, and it thus becomes a protective smock or apron—a cassock—for the mincer in his cutting operations.

Melville heightened his evocation of this image with religious terms. The mincer, with the skin of the cone donned as a robe, "now stands before you invested in the full canonicals of his calling." The mincer is engaged in making large pieces of flesh into small ones, cutting them up for the pots, cutting them thin, making "bible leaves" out of what was once the great body of the living leviathan, dressed in the skin of the grandissimus, the life-giving organ become the death-dealing one. The brief chapter ends with Melville's audacious pun and an involved religious application: "... what a candidate for an archbishoprick, what a lad for a Pope were this mincer!"

This chapter, of course, cannot be removed from its surroundings and as a part of the entire novel, but its sharp contrast is vivid testimony of the matter and manner of Melville's imaginative patterns. The garden and the charnel house, Eden and Gethsemane, the vision of the ideal and the shattering crash of the material and concrete world around us, are ambiguously confronted in a display of wit tinged with a mellowing humour. The paradise of Typee Valley and the hell of a man-of-war were never far from Melville's vision. "The Cassock" is preceded by a description of the blubber room, a scene of terror in the dull lantern light against the dark night. It is followed also by "The Try-Works," with its nightmare of terror, ending with that magnificent tribute to Ecclesiastes and its paeon to sorrow and woe. The wasteland of the whale ship has this brief study of the whale's cone centrally embedded. Surrounding it in larger lines, beyond the study of whale anatomy, lies the picture of the living schools of whales, the family and community life islanded in the waters of the East Indies.

"The Grand Armada" has the terror of the struck whale, fleeing in anguish; but it also has the comfort of companionship in the herd. Like household dogs they rubbed around the boats. In the transparent depth the newborn infant whale nursed at its mother's breast. The great umbilical cord floated in the water, still fastening mother and child.

Melville wrote only one sentence for the chapter on the sexual relations of the whales: "We saw young Leviathan amours in the deep," but he added a footnote to that sentence, also: "When overflowing with mutual esteem, the whales salute *more hominum*." Thus the whale cone in the gutter of a whaleship amidst the slaughtering and the trying out of blubber sharpens the antithetical juxtaposition of the living and the dead, the forces of life and the forces of death.

The sperm whale is celebrated as the greatest of living creatures on earth. Its tail is used to evoke the image which Moses has of God on Mt. Sinai. And its reproductive organ becomes a mincer's apron in a ritual of sterility and death.

In the midst of "The Grand Armada" scene Melville inserted a personally directed application. He turned from the presentation of the terror-stricken and wounded whales with their consternation enveloping the peaceful domestic whale community to a personal statement.

But even so, amid the tornadoed Atlantic of my being, do I myself still for ever centrally disport in mute calm; and while ponderous planets of unwaning woe revolve round me, deep down and deep inland there I still bathe me in eternal mildness of joy

Woe and delight, delight and woe is the final wave of Father Mapple's eloquent sermon. Surrounded by the symbols of man's mortal nature comes the cry of man's immortal desire.

But against this immortal desire rises the nature of man, with its sharkishness and its vulturisms and its deadly sin of pride.

Ahab, so Captain Peleg testified to the innocent Ishmael, had once thought of Life; but in the Atlantic of his being the depth of woe had turned him into a creature of death. Starbuck appealed to the "blessed influences" and invoked home, child, wife in his struggle against madness and death in Ahab. But little black Pip is the life force most effective (if ultimate failure allows for any degree of effectiveness) against the death-dealing

pride and monomania in Ahab. In the presence of Pip Ahab softens and cries, "Oh God! that man should be a thing for immortal souls to sieve through!" And hand in hand Ahab speaks softly to the boy, "There is that in thee, poor lad, which I feel too curing to my malady."

Melville opened the penultimate chapter, "The Symphony," with the bride and groom figure as "the sun seemed giving this gentle air to this bold and rolling sea" in a creative union. Ahab is touched by the scene and the domestic evocation of Starbuck, but the forces of death triumph in him and "like a blighted fruit tree he shook, and cast his last, cindered apple to the soil." But even as Melville introduced the figure of Moby-Dick in the "The Chase—First Day" he did so with the image of Jupiter carrying away Europa clinging to his horns.

The mad drive of Ahab toward revenge is carried out against a moral imperative involving the creative forces of light and life in struggle against the darkness and death with which the sharkishness and vulturism of human nature makes alliance. The carpenter works in the dry bone to create a prop for a living man. The blacksmith who has himself recovered from a death in life to which he had been cast to repair and recreate anew the broken implements of man's necessity is now drafted to forge the fatal harpoon. The humbled and bent old blacksmith joins the little black Pip in fearing the direction Ahab's pride is driving them all in "the black tragedy of the melancholy ship."

As the carpenter works over the coffin, calking its seams to make it a lifebuoy, Ahab assesses himself as "so far gone . . . in the dark side of earth, that its other side, the theoretic bright one, seems but uncertain twilight to me."

The vividly pictured vulturism of life and the irony of fate, combined with Ahab's mad driving quest, have given *Moby-Dick* the dark shadows seen by all readers. But Melville's imagination in the creative process embodies in its fundamental completeness the great Romantic antithesis of life in struggle against death. The ideal and the spiritual aspirations of the Romantic generation were his, even though they were more overlaid with certain doubts and misgivings than manifest themselves in his great literary contemporaries. When Melville saw that there was a by-pass to hell even from the gates of paradise, he surely saw that there was a way to paradise.

# *Melville's Picture of Emerson and Thoreau in "The Confidence-Man"*

EARLY in 1849 Melville spent three months in Boston. After hearing an Emerson lecture he wrote to his friend Evert Duyckinck, on February 24: "Say what they will, he's a great man."

Evert Duyckinck would not permit such a judgment to pass without challenge. On March 3 Melville wrote to Duyckinck a more detailed comment on Emerson:

Yet I think Emerson is more than a brilliant fellow.. Swear he is a humbug—then is he no common humbug . To my surprise, I found him quite intelligible. .

I could readily see in Emerson, notwithstanding his merit, a gaping flaw. It was, the insinuation, that had he lived in those days when the world was made, he might have offered some valuable suggestions.

Melville's interest in Emerson continued for years. He read Emerson's essays with critical interest, in or after 1861, as is attested by the marked copies from his library, with their marginal notes. Through his associations with Hawthorne in the Berkshires he had ample occasion to get Hawthorne's partly sympathetic but generally aloof reactions to the Concord sage. However, regardless of how Hawthorne might or might not have served as a link between Emerson and Melville, it is, I think, demonstrably true that Melville used Emerson as the pattern of

the mystic in his *The Confidence-Man*. The mystic resembles Emerson in posture and physical appearance, in manner and in public associations. Moreover, the mystic's conversation bears a relationship, in general and in many particulars, to the ideas and phrasing of Emerson's *Nature*.

The mystic appears in chapter xxxvi, with no forewarnings. He adds little directly to the very thin thread of plot in the story; instead, the several chapters in which the mystic and his follower figure make up an interlude in the action. Indeed, the six chapters of this episode have as their justification the fact that they add to the variety and scope of Melville's satirical caricature of the American scene.

In contrast to the preceding characters in the book the mystic is described in detail, as though Melville were taking particular care with his picture. The details are exact, and the general impression explicit. The mystic is

a blue-eyed man, sandy-haired, and Saxon-looking, perhaps five-and forty, tall, and, but for a certain angularity, well-made; little touch of the drawing-room about him, but a look of plain propriety of a Puritan sort, with a kind of farmer dignity. His age seemed betokened more by his brow, placidly thoughtful, than by his general aspect, which had that look of youthfulness in maturity, peculiar sometimes to habitual health of body, the original gift of nature, or in part the effect or reward of steady temperance of the passions kept so, perhaps, by constitution as much as morality. A neat, comely, almost ruddy cheek, coolly fresh, like a red clover-blossom at coolish dawn—the colour of warmth preserved by the virtue of chill. Toning the whole man, was one-knows-not-what of shrewdness and mythiness, strangely jumbled; in that way, he seemed a kind of cross between a Yankee peddler and a Tartar priest, though it seemed as if, at a pinch, the first would not in all probability play second fiddle to the last.

All this, it seems, is apparent to one who, for a moment, first sees the mystic. This much, at least, the cosmopolitan, a character of the story who is accosted by the mystic, gathers in one brief survey. The physical description of the man is very close to what an observer would have seen in a survey of Emerson in the middle of the century. Eyes, hair, height, build, posture, dignity, temperateness, coolness, and the combination of shrewdness and mysticalness—all are particularly similar in the mystic and in Emerson. "His eyes were very blue," wrote his son, Edward Waldo Emerson. His hair, formerly dark brown, was

turning a sandy color by 1849. When Melville heard him lecture, at which time he was forty-six years old, Emerson had a strong appearance of being Saxon-looking.

The dual aspects of Emerson's nature were remarked by many people who knew him, but no observer summed up the opposing poles of his thinking more aptly than did Lowell in his often quoted *Fable for Critics*. Lowell speaks of Emerson's "Greek head on right Yankee shoulders" and emphasizes the contrast of "Olympus for one pole, for t'other the Exchange"; and he calls him a Plotinus-Montaigne, a coupling which would certainly attract Melville's attention. This contrast in Emerson's nature has become the standard biographical approach.

George Woodberry writes:

Emerson leaves a double image on the mind that has dwelt long upon his memory. He is a shining figure as on some mount of Transfiguration, and he was a parochial man. In one aspect he is of kin with old Ionian philosophers.; in the other he is a Bostonian,...the creature of local environment.

Emerson's face, says Bliss Perry:

..is asymmetrical, seen from one side, it is that of a shrewd New England farmer; from the other, it is a face of a seer, a

"Prophetic soul of the wide world

Dreaming on things to come."

Arthur Hugh Clough, Holmes, Hawthorne and, others saw this puzzling feature of Emerson. Hence Melville, in his picture of the Saxon-looking mystic, had ample reason for describing him as a mixture of Yankee peddler and Tartar priest.

In his letter on Emerson to Dyuckinck, Melville commented on Emerson's lack of social warmth, his intellectuality. Melville often uses "brains" or intellectuality as a symbol for coldness, while "heart" indicates fellowship and warmth to him. In his personal copy of Emerson's *Essays*, read in 1861 or later, Melville was still impressed by this dual quality in the mystic sage. Annotating the passage in Emerson's essay, "The Poet," which begins, "Language is fossil poetry," Melville wrote:

This is admirable, as many other thoughts of Mr. Emerson's are. His gross and astonishing errors & illusions spring from a self-conceit so intensely intellectual and calm that at first one hesitates to call it by

its right name. Another species of Mr. Emerson's errors, or rather blindness, proceeds from a defect in the region of the heart <sup>1</sup>

Emerson's evaluation of himself included a recognition of this coldness of his own nature. "I was born cold," he wrote. "My bodily habit is cold. I shiver in and out; don't heat to the good purpose called enthusiasm a quarter so quick and kindly as my neighbors." His journal continued to carry complaints of this nature. "What is called a warm heart I have not." "I have not the kind affections of a pigeon."<sup>2</sup>

Melville on first contact with Emerson understood this deficiency in his nature. Thinking of his own jolly times with the group of writers who drank together in the Duyckinck home, Melville had written, in the letter previously quoted in part:

I was going to say something more—It was this.—You complain that Emerson tho' a denizen of the land of gingerbread, is above munching a plain cake in company of jolly fellows, & swiging [*sic*] off his ale like you & me. Ah, my dear sir, that's his misfortune, not his fault. His belly, sir, is in his chest, & his brains descend down into his neck, & offer an obstacle to a draught of ale or a mouthful of cake <sup>3</sup>

When Melville described the mystic with the words "coolly" and "chill," he was but using an idea which he readily associated

1. William Braswell, "Melville as a Critic of Emerson," *American Literature*, IX, 331. Dr. Braswell apparently considered and rejected the possibilities of the mystic of *The Confidence-Man* being a picture of Emerson, for he says: "Carl Van Vechten's theory that *The Confidence-Man* is a satire on Transcendentalism seems to me unfounded" (p. 319n). O.F. Matthiessen, in *American Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 472, n 1, says "It is quite possible that Melville may have remembered his impression of Emerson when making this sketch of a mystic in *The Confidence-Man*." My doctoral dissertation, "Melville and the Idea of Progress" (University of Washington, 1939; unpublished), devoted three pages to a survey of Melville's use of Emerson and Thoreau in *The Confidence-Man*.

2. Ludwig Lewisohn, *The Story of American Literature* (Modern Library ed.), p. 109. Lewisohn devotes several pages to an analysis of this aspect of Emerson's character. Lowell's *Fable for Critics* contained the couplet:

"E. sits in a mystery calm and intense,  
And looks coolly around him with sharp commonsense."

3. The letter is printed in full in Willard Throp, *Herman Melville* (American Book Company, 1938), pp. 371-73.



with Emerson. In *The Confidence-Man* the cosmopolitan invites the mystic to sit down and "take some of this wine." The mystic with the kind of allusion and reference common to Emerson, replies:

To invite me to sit down with you is hospitable and hospitality being fabled to be of oriental origin, and forming, as it does the subject of a pleasing Arabian romance, as well as being a very romantic thing in itself—hence I always hear the expressions of hospitality with pleasure. But, as for the wine, my regard for that beverage is so extreme, and I am so fearful of letting it sate me, that I keep my love for it in the lasting condition of untried abstraction. Briefly, I quaff immense draughts of wine from the page of Hafiz, but wine from a cup I seldom as much as sip.<sup>4</sup>

As the mystic sat down in response to the invitation to drink, he sat there "purely and coldly radiant as a prism. It seemed as if one could almost hear him vitreously chime and ring." The cosmopolitan calls for a goblet of ice water. "'Ice it well, waiter,' said he." When brought, the goblet of iced water was refreshing to the mystic, "its very coldness, as with some is the case, proving not entirely uncongenial." After drinking, the mystic speaks "in a manner the most cool, self-possessed, and matter-of-fact possible."

A stranger, "a haggard, inspired-looking man now approached—a crazy beggar, asking alms under the form of peddling, a rhapsodical tract." One might think that the rhapsodical, inspired-looking beggar might find a sympathetic response from the mystic; but not so. The mystic has just been talking in a high-flown, idealistic vein of how "Pharaoh's poorest brick-maker lies prouder in his rags than the Emperor of all the Russias in his hollands," but such sentiments do not dispose him to act with favor toward the actual man in need before him. The cosmopolitan, in direct contrast, spoke to him kindly, gave him a shilling, and promised to read the tract. "But the stranger [the mystic] sat more like a cold prism than ever, while an expression of keen Yankee cuteness, now replacing his former mystical one, lent added icicles to his aspect."

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4. Emerson quotes from Hafiz or mentions him twenty-five times in his published works, according to the count of Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes. Emerson's general abstinence from drink was well-known to Duyckinck, Hawthorne, and Melville—all of whom enjoyed a sociable punch bowl.

Melville's picture of the mystic is one of a Yankee and an oracular mystic, a combination of shrewd, self-protecting mistrust and of misty mythicalness. He speaks grandly of abstract beauty and trust, worthiness, virtue, and beautiful souls; yet with Yankee doubt he mistrusts the actual man.

The mystic, after a dozen pages of conversation, is given the name Mark Winsome. This name is particularly adaptable to Emerson in a double sense. Melville's delight in puns—especially, too, puns of an enigmatical character—is one aspect of his work which has never been adequately explored. Melville's letter to Duyckinck in 1849 regarding Emerson recognizes the fact of Emerson's enlisting followers; so, also, does Lowell's *Fable for Critics*—in fact, such was the general impression of Emerson held by those who knew him. He could, and did, *win some* disciples. Also, one might truly say: "Emerson's *winsome* voice, smile, charm, manner, all combined to give him a wide reputation for winsomeness, especially as a lecturer."

But Melville does not stop with presenting a fairly recognizable portrait of Emerson in the character Mark Winsome: he also puts the ideas of Emerson in an exaggerated and caricatured form into the mouth of the mystic. Mark Winsome has swallowed, but not very thoroughly digested, Emerson's *Nature*. Melville's use of this little book as a basis for the mystic's conversation does not come from any casual and distant association. The argument of the mystic in practically every point comes from *Nature*—by suggestion, by association of ideas, by direct condensation, or by distorted synopsis. This famous essay was used deliberately and in using it Melville offers a criticism of the nature of transcendentalism.

Emerson's *Nature* is too rhapsodic and too much a blanket indorsement of nature for a man of Melville's temperament. He questions the beneficence of nature. Emerson is philosophical and general in his approach. He lays down conclusions and then supports them by an appeal to particulars. Emerson sees, for instance, a lesson taught by nature in debt, for "nature is a discipline."

Debt, grinding debt, whose iron face the widow, the orphan, and the sons of genius fear and hate—debt, which consumes so much time, which so cripples and disheartens a great spirit with cares that seem so

base, is a preceptor whose lessons cannot be forgone, and is needed most by those who suffer from it most.

Such a cold view is far from the warm-hearted humanity and charity Melville admired. He had in his own life struggled too much with poverty and debt to appreciate his need for such struggle. His personal attitude was far different from that suggested by Emerson's coldly impersonal statement. His satirical reply to such thought is to present an individual case, the beggar who is befriended by the cosmopolitan and scorned by the coldly idealistic mystic.

Throughout *Nature* runs a strong note of trust and acceptance.

Undoubtedly we have no questions to ask which are unanswerable  
We must trust the perfection of the creation . . .

Beauty is the mark God sets upon virtue . . .

Beauty, in its largest and profoundest sense, is one expression for the universe. . . .

An enraged man is a lion, a cunning man is a fox, a firm man is a rock, a learned man is a torch. A lamb is innocence, a snake is subtle spite.....

There is no object so foul that intense light will not make beautiful . . . Even the corpse has its own beauty . . . almost all the individual forms are agreeable to the eye.....the acorn... ..the egg, the lion's claw, the serpent. ....

The moral law lies at the center of nature and radiates to the circumference . . .

In leading up to his often cited passage descriptive of the mystical union of the self with God, Emerson uses the words: "In the woods, too, a man casts off his years, as the snake his slough, and at what period soever of life is always a child." After a few lines he continues:

I am the lover of uncontained and immortal beauty. In the wilderness, I find something more dear and connate than in streets or villages. In the tranquil landscape, and especially in the distant line of the horizon, man beholds somewhat as beautiful as his own nature.

These few quotations from Emerson's *Nature* give the various elements for a conversation to develop between the cosmopolitan and the mystic. The cosmopolitan, in a Socratic manner and with the irony of overstatement, feigns to fall in with the idea of the mystic. He says:

Yes, with you and Schiller, I am pleased to believe that beauty is

at bottom incompatible with ill, and therefore am so eccentric as to have confidence in the latent benignity of that beautiful creature, the rattlesnake, whose lithe neck and burnished maze of tawny gold, as he sleekly curls aloft in the sun, who on the prairie can behold without wonder?

Melville here, as he frequently does, leaves the generalization to stab at a particular point. He was acquainted with the use of *reductio ad absurdum*, and he applies it here.

As the cosmopolitan spoke his words concerning the rattlesnake,

he seems so to enter into their spirit—as some earnest descriptive speakers will—as unconsciously to wreath his form and sidelong crest his head, till he all but seemed the creature described. Meantime, the stranger regarded him with little surprise apparently though with much contemplativeness of a mystical sort and presently said: “When charmed by the beauty of that viper did it never occur to you to change personalities with him? to feel what it was to a snake? to glide unsuspected in grass? to sting, to kill at a touch; your whole beautiful body one iridescent scabbard of death?”<sup>5</sup>

Emerson’s use of the word “connate” and the phrase “as beautiful as his own nature” might have helped to suggest this personification. Moreover, the question of “accountability” of moral law in nature is continued, with the rattlesnake as a text. If it is accountable, “I need not say,” said the cosmopolitan, “that such accountability is neither to you, nor me, nor the Court of Common Pleas, but to something superior.”

Emerson had urged that the questions we have suggested to us can be answered by nature. Melville was more skeptical. Is the rattlesnake’s accountability manifest in nature? Even, is man’s accountability manifest, though we all feel that man is accountable? This question, says the cosmopolitan, is “a *reductio ad absurdum*, proving the objection vain.” Then he continued:

But if now you consider what capacity for mischief there is in a rattlesnake (observe, I do not charge it with being mischievous, I but

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5. Emerson, in the closing paragraph to *Nature*, wrote: “What we are, that only can we seek.” Also he included the sentences which might well attract Melville’s attention: “Each creature is only a modification of the other; the likeness in them is more than the difference. and their radical law is one and the same.. Every such truth is the absolute Ens seen from one side But it has innumerable sides.” *Nature* uses snakes as examples four times.

say it has the capacity), could you well avoid admitting that that would be no symmetrical view of the universe which should maintain that, while to man it is forbidden to kill, without judicial cause, his fellow, yet the rattle-snake has an implied permit of unaccountability to murder any creature it takes capricious unbrage at—man included?— But [he breaks off the talk] this is no genial talk .

This abrupt termination of the rattlesnake discussion with the use of the word "genial" recalls one of Emerson's more airy sentences: "How calmly and genially the mind apprehends one after another the laws of physics?"

Melville's mystic, while the snake conversation continued, had found—even as Emerson might have—"another beautiful truth" in the fact of the snake's rattle,

a sound, as I have been told, like the shaking together of small, dry skulls in a tune of the Waltz of Death. . . So that whoever is destroyed by a rattle snake, or other harmful agent, it is his own fault. He should have respected the label. Hence the significant passage in Scripture, "Who will pity the charmer that is bitten with a serpent?"

The cosmopolitan is blunt in his reply: "I would pity him." Thus Melville gets another opportunity to emphasize the coldness of this abstract idealism and to assert that the heart is a necessary organ in man. "Let casuists decide the casuistry, but the compassion the heart decides for itself," the cosmopolitan asserts.

The mystic at one place in the conversation is made to raise a question "with infantile intellectuality." This use of the word "infantile" would be difficult to explain were it not that Melville was jesting, and Emerson's *Nature* supplies the justification.

To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature.....The sun illuminates only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and the heart of the child. The lover of nature is he ....who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood.

Emerson later speaks too of "the wisdom of children."

There is in this chapter on the mystic some fun with the kind of classical allusion and quotation in which Emerson frequently indulged.

"I conjecture him to be what, among the ancient Egyptians, was called a——" using some unknown word.

"A——! And what is that?"

"A——is what Proclus, in a little note to his third book on the

theology of Plato, defines as —— ——” coming out with a sentence of Greek.<sup>6</sup>

Later the mystic is saying in what he professes to be a direct answer:

“Briefly, then, and clearly, because, as before said, I conjecture him to be what, among the ancient Egyptians ——”

“Pray, now,” earnestly deprecated the cosmopolitan, “pray, now, why disturb the repose of those ancient Egyptians? What to us are their words or their thoughts? Are we pauper Arabs, without a house of our own, that, with the mummies, we must turn squatters among the dust of the Catacombs?”

Emerson in *Nature* begins a listing of references and allusions which includes the Brahmins, Pythagoras, Plato, Bacon, Leibnitz, Swedenborg, with “from the era of the Egyptians. . . .” Moreover, Emerson himself had in the first paragraph of *Nature* protested against this very same kind of groping “among the dry bones of the past.” He said that our age “builds the sepulchres of the fathers” when we should “demand our own works and laws and worship.” Yet he gleans his supporting examples and references from the mythology and history of the world. It is the natural manner of his thinking to bring together Sallust, Gibbon, Leonidas, Arnold Winkelried, Columbus, Sir Harry Vane, Charles II, Lord Russell, Homer, Pindar, Socrates, Phocion, Jesus—all in one paragraph and all used to support one point. It is little wonder that Melville—himself a comber of the world for material to develop an idea, as in the chapter “The Whiteness of the Whale” in *Moby-Dick*—was prompted to the satirical comment: “Pray, now, why disturb the repose of those ancient Egyptians?”

Emerson had written of how light makes even a corpse beautiful. Melville’s mystic says that “death, though in a worm, is majestic; while life, though in a king, is contemptible. So talk not against mummies. It is a part of my mission to teach mankind a due reverence for mummies.” Lowell’s characterization of Emerson in the *Fable for Critics* should be remembered:

So perfect a balance there is in his head,  
That he talks of things sometimes as if they were dead;  
Life, nature, love, God, and affairs of that sort,  
He looks at as merely ideas; in short,

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6. Emerson uses the Greek word for “beauty” in *Nature*.

As if they were fossils stuck round in a cabinet,  
 Of such vast extent that our earth's a mere dab in it, . . .  
 With the quiet precision of science he'll sort'em,  
 But you can't help suspecting the whole a *post mortem*

Melville's mystic speaks in the same offhand way of consistency in which Emerson did in his essay "Self-reliance."<sup>7</sup> The mystic explains:

I seldom care to be consistent. In a philosophical view, consistency is a certain level at all times, maintained in all the thoughts of one's mind. But since nature is nearly all hill and dale, how can one keep naturally advancing in knowledge without submitting to the natural inequalities in the progress?

Ending chapter ii in *Nature*, with the emphasis of position, is the unqualified dictum: "A man is fed, not that he may be fed, but that he may work." With like directness the mystic speaks: "Sir, . . . man came into this world, not to sit down and muse, not to befog himself with vain subtleties, but to gird up his loins and to work."

*Nature*, in the final two chapters, considers the nature of man.

Three problems are put by nature to the mind: What is matter? Whence is it? and Whereto?

Who can set bounds to the possibilities of man?

What is a day? What is a year? What is summer? What is woman? What is a child?

The cosmopolitan questions the mystic about a third man. "But tell me, what do you take him for? What is he?" "What are you?" the mystic of *The Confidence-Man*, taking his cue from Emerson, replies: "What am I? Nobody knows who anybody is."

Most of the parts of the mystic's conversation with the cosmopolitan in chapter xxxvi of *The Confidence-Man* have parallels or word associations in Emerson's *Nature*. But Melville, in presenting his satire of Emerson, did not stop there. To ground this

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7. I see no evidence that Melville used Emerson's *Essays*, either first or second series, in his picture of Mark Winsome, except at this point on consistency. But this was a much-discussed by-product of Emerson's teaching, and it might well have been the subject of conversation in the Duyckinck circle in New York while Melville was on intimate terms with that literary coterie or with the Hawthornes in the Berkshires.

mystic even more firmly on Emerson and to extend the criticism of transcendentalism, Melville introduces the mystic's disciple, Egbert, who is explicitly based on Henry David Thoreau.<sup>8</sup> Egbert is presented as "a promenader," "the first among mankind to reduce to practice the principles of Mark Winsome—principles previously accounted as less adapted to life than the closet." In fact, he is introduced belittlingly with the words, "This... is Egbert, a disciple," as though he had no individual being.

Mark Winsome wishes Egbert to explain his mysticism to the cosmopolitan. He says:

You, Egbert, by simply setting forth your practice, can do more to enlighten one as to my theory, than I myself can by mere speech. Indeed, it is by you that I myself best understand myself ...Now, as in a glass, you, Egbert, in your life, reflect to me the more important part of my system. He, who approves you, approves the philosophy of Mark Winsome.<sup>9</sup>

"Furthermore", glancing upon him paternally, "Egbert is both my disciple and my poet. For poetry is not a thing of ink and rhyme, but of thought and act, and, in the latter way, is by anyone to be found anywhere, when in useful action sought.<sup>10</sup> In a word, my disciple here is a thriving young merchant, a practical poet in the West India trade. There," presenting Egbert's hand to the cosmopolitan, "I join you, and leave you." With which words, and without bowing, the master withdrew.

8. Melville, as I have pointed out in another article, used Thoreau as a basis for "Bartleby."

9. Lowell does not name Thoreau by name in his *Fable for Critics*.

"There comes——, for instance; to see him's rare sport,  
Tread in Emerson's tracks with legs painfully short;  
How he jumps, how he strains, and gets red in the face,  
To keep step with the mystagogue's natural pace!  
He follows as close as a stick to a rocket,  
His fingers exploring the prophet's each pocket."

10. Although Emerson worked out his theory of poetry much more fully in the essay, "The Poet" his ideas are presented in embryo form in *Nature* and are followed fairly accurately by Melville, though in his own language. Emerson wrote: "...the poet conforms things to his thoughts..... [He] esteems nature.....as fluid, and impresses his being thereon..... he invests dust and stones with humanity. ... The remotest spaces of nature are visited, and the farthest sundered things are brought together, by a subtle spiritual connection.....and all objects shrink and expand to serve the passion of the poet."



It might seem, at first glance, that this introduction of the disciple as engaged in the West India trade, a practical young merchant, would be far from the real Thoreau, but Melville was a devotee of the pun, and his sense of humor often followed odd associations. Thoreau dealt heavily in Hindu, or Indian mysticism; hence he was engaged in the West India trade, introducing a product of India to the West.

Egbert is pictured as fifteen years the junior of Mark Winsome. Thoreau was fourteen years younger than Emerson. Melville's description of Egbert, if he had never seen Thoreau, would naturally be more general than his description of Emerson, whom he had seen. But he hit upon some points of Thoreau's appearance which were subject to discussion. "His [Egbert's] countenance of that neuter sort, which, in repose, is neither prepossessing nor disagreeable, so that it seemed quite uncertain how he would turn out." Hawthorne, with enthusiastic exaggeration, described Thoreau as

ugly as sin, long-nosed, queer mouthed, and with uncouth and somewhat rustic, though courteous manners, corresponding very well with such an exterior. But his ugliness is of an honest and agreeable fashion, and becomes him much better than beauty.<sup>11</sup>

Here the latter sentence seems to modify and soften the first blunt statement.

In 1855, the year before *The Confidence-Man* was written, the young Mr. F. B. Sanborn of Concord wrote a comment on Thoreau in his notebook:

He is a little under size, with a huge Emersonian nose, bluish gray eyes, brown hair, and a ruddy weather-beaten face, which reminds me of some shrewd and honest animal's—some retired philosophical woodchuck or magnanimous fox. He dresses very plainly, wears his collar turned over like Mr. Emerson [we young collegians then wearing ours upright] and often an old dress-coat, broad in the skirts, and by no means a fit. He walks about with a brisk, rustic air, and never seems tired.<sup>12</sup>

11. *The American Notebooks* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932), p. 166. Hawthorne probably often talked with Melville concerning Thoreau.

12. *Henry D. Thoreau* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1882), p. 199. The note in brackets was apparently added by Mr. Sanborn when preparing the biography.

Here in a few lines Sanborn naturally connects Thoreau to Emerson in two regards, as though the one were dependent on the other. Melville, too, connected Egbert's costume with his master's. "His dress was neat, with just enough of the mode to save it from the reproach of originality, in which general respect, though with a readjustment of details, his costume seemed modelled upon his master's."

Mark Winsome and Egbert, in appearance and relationship, resembled Emerson and Thoreau too closely and in too many details for the resemblance to be accidental. Mark Winsome's discourse is derived from certain aspects of Emerson's *Nature*. Even more conclusively and closely is Egbert's discourse on friendship an examination of the cold heartlessness of a section of *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, a book which Melville borrowed in 1850 from Evert Duyckinck. The connection between these two sections of *The Confidence-Man* and the *Week* is so close, however, that it can hardly be supposed to rest on a casual acquaintanceship six years removed.

In just the same way that Melville confronted the mystic with the particular example of the rattlesnake, he also asked Egbert, the disciple, to consider a particular instance of friendship:

The case is this. There are two friends, friends from childhood, bosom friends, one of whom, for the first time, being in need, for the first time seeks a loan from the other, who, so far as fortune goes, is more than competent to grant it.

The two men agree to act out the episode, the cosmopolitan to be the beseeching friend, calling himself Frank; the disciple of the transcendental philosopher, calling himself Charlie, to receive the request in a manner becoming to his principles. Frank, acting his part in a manly fashion, comes directly to the point. He is as open and direct as the name he assumes.

"Charlie, I am in want—urgent want of money."

"That's not well."

"But it *will* be well, Charlie, if you loan me a hundred dollars. I would not ask this of you, only my need is sore, and you and I have so long shared hearts and minds together, ... that nothing remains to prove our friendship than.....to share purses. You will do me the favor, won't you?"

"Favor? What do you mean by asking me to do you a favor?....."

"But won't you loan me the money?"

"No, Frank "

Thoreau devoted thirty pages of the *Week*, under "Wednesday," to his reflections and observations on friendship. No attempt is made here to do justice to Thoreau's ideas, but rather to show that Melville used Thoreau and this section of the *Week* as a basis for his caricature of transcendental friendship.

Thoreau affirmed that kindness was not necessarily a part of the relation of friendship, "and no such affront can be offered to a Friend as a conscious goodwill...." This conception is elaborated in several different ways :

If one abates a little the price of his wood, or gives a neighbor his vote at town-meeting, or a barrel of apples, or lends him his wagon frequently, it is esteemed a rare instance of Friendship. ...Most contemplate only what would be the accidental and trifling advantages of Friendship, as that the Friend can assist in time of need, by his substance, or his influence, or his counsel, but he who foresees such advantages in this relation proves himself blind to its real advantage, or indeed wholly inexperienced in the relation itself. Such services are particular and menial, compared with the perpetual and all-embracing service which it is.....*We do not wish for Friends to feed and clothe our bodies* [italics supplied],—neighbors are kind enough for that,—but to do the like office to our spirits ....

Nothing is so difficult as to help a Friend in matters which do not require the aid of Friendship, but only a cheap and trivial service...

Friendship is, at any rate, a relation of perfect equality. It cannot well spare any outward sign of equal obligation and advantage.

In the light of Thoreau's presentation in the *Week*, Charlie is not doing violence to true friendship in refusing the loan, a refusal which he justified thus :

I give away money, but never loan it; and of course the man who calls himself my friend is above receiving alms.....To be sure there are, and I have, what is called business friends; that is, commercial acquaintances, very convenient persons. But I draw a red-ink line between them and my friends in the true sense—my friends social and intellectual. In brief, a true friend has nothing to do with loans; he should have a soul above loans.

Charlie continued his discourse, enthusiastic in his practical application of transcendental principle:

Loans are such unfriendly accommodations as are to be had from the soulless corporation of a bank.....Well, now, where is the friendliness of my letting a starving man have, say, the money's worth of a

barrel of flour upon the condition that, on a given day, he shall let me have the money's worth of a barrel and a half of flour.....

Moreover, Charlie argues, if the money is not paid on that agreed-upon day, then comes the cruel proviso of foreclosure, a contingency which must be at least contemplated as possible from the very first. Can the loan be a friend's act and the foreclosure an enemy's act? "Don't you see? The enmity lies couched in the friendship, just as the ruin in the relief."

All right, Frank urges, still in need of money, loan me without interest.

That would be alms.

Well, as Frank's need is great, I'll accept the alms. Between friends there is no humiliation.

Here Charlie cites

my sublime master, who, in his *Essay on Friendship*, says so nobly, that if he want a terrestrial convenience, not to his friend celestial (or friend social and intellectual) would he go, no: for his terrestrial convenience, to his friend terrestrial (or humbler business friend) he goes.

Emerson's essay, "Friendship," from the *Essays, First Series*, while not using these words, does make such a distinction:

My friends have come to me unsought. The great God gave them to me.....

I hate the prostitution of the name of friendship to signify modish and worldly alliances.....

Why should we desecrate noble and beautiful souls by intruding on them? Why insist on rash personal relations with your friends?..... Let him be to me a spirit. A message, a thought, a sincerity, a glance from him, I want, but not news, nor pottage. I can get politics and chat and neighborly conveniences from cheaper companions.

Frank, anxious for the loan, agrees to be a friend humbler than the celestial.

Very good. Business is business. A loan. Three per cent a month? Security? An indorser?

Surely you do not mean—

"You forget we are now business friends.".....

"Since then, Charlie, neither as the one nor the other sort of friend you have defined, can I prevail with you; how if, combining the two, I sue as both?"

"Are you a centaur?"

Frank, putting aside intellectual argument, makes a warm-

hearted appeal "Ah, what is friendship, if it be not the helping hand and the feeling heart, the good Samaritan pouring out at need the purse as the vial!"

Frank continues his plea.

Oh, Charlie! you talk not to a god, a being who in himself holds his own estate, but to a man who, being a man, is the sport of fate's wind and wave, and who mounts toward heaven or sinks toward hell, as the billows roll him in trough or on crest.

And Charlie replies: "Man has a soul; which, if he will, puts him beyond fortune's finger and the future's spite. Don't whine like fortune's whipped dog, Frank...."

Melville's warmhearted, friendly, and generous nature rebelled at this cold aloofness which he saw in the two Concord writers. It had to him a quality of inhumanity.

"Help, help, Charlie, I want help!"

"Help? to say nothing of the friend, there is something wrong about the man who wants help. There is somewhere a defect, a want, in brief, a need, a crying need, somewhere about that man."

"So there is Charlie.—Help, help!"

"How foolish a cry, when to implore help, is itself the proof of undesert of it."

"Oh, this, all along, is not you, Charlie, but some ventriloquist who usurps your larynx. It is Mark Winsome that speaks, not Charlie."

"If so, thank heaven, the voice of Mark Winsome is not alien but congenial to my larynx. If the philosophy of that illustrious teacher find little response among mankind at large, it is less that they do not possess teachable tempers, than because they are so unfortunate as not to have natures predisposed to accord with him."

"Welcome, that compliment to humanity," exclaimed Frank with energy, "the truer because unintended. And long in this respect may humanity remain what you affirm it. And long it will; since humanity, inwardly feeling how subject it is to straits, and hence how precious is help, will, for selfishness' sake, if no other, long postpone ratifying a philosophy that banishes help from the world."

Melville thus puts a plea for human sympathy against abstract coldness. He wants his argument and his thinking reduced to the level of particulars. Would you, under these circumstances, turn this man away empty? It is by use of such individual instances that he reduces transcendentalism to a paradox. Involved in the incident is an ironical commentary on the "practicalness" of the disciple of Mark Winsome, for he, under all circumstances, finds it unnecessary to aid others.

Thoreau's wording was such as to arouse Melville's scorn. In the *Week* Thoreau wrote:

Friendship is not so kind as is imagined; it has not much human blood in it, but consists with a certain disregard for men and their erections, the Christian duties and humanities, while it purifies the air like electricity. It is not the highest sympathy merely, but a pure and lofty society, . . . which . . . does not hesitate to disregard the humbler rights and duties of humanity. When he . . . treats his Friend like a Christian, or as he can afford,—then Friendship ceases to be Friendship, and becomes charity . . .

Melville's scorn is cutting. Such cold-bloodedness has from him no consideration. Frank, as a human being, asks for aid. Charlie tells him to come as a stranger, begging alms, and he shall receive a few pennies. "But no man drops pennies into the hat of a friend, let me tell you. If you turn beggar, then, for the honour of noble friendship, I turn stranger."

"Enough", cried the other, rising, and with a toss of his shoulders seeming disdainfully to throw off the character he had assumed. "Enough. I have had my fill of the philosophy of Mark Winsome as put into action. And moonshiny as it in theory may be, yet a very practical philosophy it turns out in effect, as he himself engaged I should find . . . Apt disciple! Why wrinkle the brow, and waste the oil both of life and the lamp only to turn out a head kept cool by the under ice of the heart? . . . Pray, leave me, and with you take the last dregs of your inhuman philosophy. And here, take this shilling, and at the first wood-landing buy yourself a few chips to warm the frozen natures of you and your philosopher by"

The hypothetical conversation is thus abruptly ended; and thus abruptly Melville takes his leave of Mark Winsome and his promenader disciple, Egbert. The satirical treatment of these two transcendentalists, both friends of Melville's friends, both of whom he was familiar with through their works, comprises one-seventh of *The Confidence-Man* in substance and a much greater part than that in reading interest. These chapters of discussion by Melville underscore the warmth and humor of his nature and indicate the manly, practical directness of his thinking. He was interested in viewing his contemporaries and challenging some of their conclusions. His caricatures of Emerson and Thoreau are done with pointed directness, though almost entirely without bitterness. He sees some of the absurdities into which their abstractions lead them. He answers abstraction with concrete example, a practice which characterizes his work

throughout. The coldness of logic he met with the warmth of human sympathy. On that point he was clear and emphatic. Emerson and Thoreau both offered qualities which he could admire, but his judgment of them is critical. His attack is aimed directly at the center of their thinking, of their abstract approaches to life's problems. Melville probably did not know that Thoreau gave up his own coat to clothe Johnny Riordan. He would have applauded such an act. He objected to omitting such human directness from the transcendental essays.

# *Melville's Goneril*

## *and*

# *Fanny Kemble*

THE most savage caricature in all of Herman Melville's work is the briefly drawn study of Goneril in *The Confidence-Man*. This character, though presented in a few pages, is carefully outlined in person, in temper, and in surrounding circumstances. Melville lavished particular care upon her. In fact, the whole episode is written with richness of language, imagination, sharpness of vindictive, and implication. The name itself carries one over to Lear's savage daughter, as Melville certainly intended it should, but Melville's Goneril borrows from Shakespeare's creation only the name and the intangible connotations which accompany it. There is a further reason, however, for Melville's use of this Shakespearean name for his character.

Melville's Goneril was a wife and a mother, but she had none of the softening qualities which should accompany such relationships. She had one of those anomalously vicious natures which can be evil without reason. In her appearance, even, a certain forbiddingness was apparent, though it was combined with some pleasing attributes. She was lithe and straight, but her Indian figure was not without an impairing effect on her bust. Though her complexion was rosy, even that charm was offset by "a certain hardness and bakedness, like that of the glazed colours on stoneware." Her mouth would have been pretty but for a too obvious trace of moustache. Melville wished to emphasize the paradoxical picture of a character containing the elements of beauty without achieving the effects of beauty. "Upon the whole," he wrote, "aided by the resources of the toilet, her appearance at distance was such, that some might



have thought her, if anything, rather beautiful, though of a style of beauty rather peculiar and cactus-like."

But this certain hardness in Goneril was much more apparent in her temper than in her appearance. Melville certainly caricatures—in fact, he stops just short of burlesque—in this study in temperament. He confesses that he hardly knew how to reveal this unusual character. She had a natural antipathy to breast of chicken, custard, peach, or grape, yet she could munch on hard crackers and brawn of ham. She liked lemons. She shunned candy, yet she ate dried sticks of blue clay. She was taciturn. She would seldom speak before three o'clock in the afternoon: that much of each day was required to thaw her into talking terms with humanity. She stared intently and curiously, possibly menacingly, out of her large metallic eyes.

She seemed to derive pleasure from simply causing pain to those around her. "Goneril," wrote Melville, "held it flattery to hint praise even of the absent, and even if merited, but honesty, to fling people's imputed faults into their faces." She stabbed as though with an icicle-dagger, and when she saw innocence and frankness tyrannized she chuckled to herself as she munched her sticks of blue clay.

This character study in *The Confidence-Man* is indeed an interesting offshoot of Melville's robust genius. The character itself is worth contemplation; and the narrative episode in which this half-woman, half-devil is embodied is certainly not one of the less interesting parts of Melville's most unusual and least read book. However, the character Goneril takes on an added significance in being Melville's caricature of a widely known contemporary woman, the Shakespearean actress and dramatic reader, Fanny Kemble. Hence, Melville's use of the name *Goneril* had a double barb: it carried associations with Lear's violent and unfeminine daughter and it also related to the most widely discussed interpreter of Shakespeare's women of that generation.

Fanny Kemble was born into an English family of actors and actresses who had specialized in Shakespeare. When she went on the stage she captured London by storm. After several years of great popularity in England she acted in American theatres with equal success. She left the stage, however, to marry Pieroe

Butler, scion of an aristocratic, slave-owning Philadelphia family. Two daughters were born to the ill-matched couple, but domestic harmony never prevailed. As the perpetual family conflict quickened in intensity, the reasons for friction became more and more involved and far-reaching in scope, though they seemed largely to focus in quarrels over the two girls. Pierce Butler exercised his legal rights as a father to assume complete control of the children, even forbidding the daughters the privilege of speaking to their mother. Mrs. Butler returned to England and the stage, a result of the quarrels to which her husband bitterly objected. He did not want the wife of Pierce Butler to disgrace the family name by acting. He brought suit for divorce, his wife returned to America to contest the action. To provide for her livelihood during the litigation—so as not to be dependent upon her husband—, she began giving her tremendously popular Shakespearean readings.

Melville was in Boston for ten weeks early in 1849, where his wife, the daughter of Chief Justice Lemuel Shaw of the Massachusetts Supreme Court, had gone to give birth to their first child. Melville had ample time to read the newspapers, to absorb the gossip, and to attend Emerson's lectures and Mrs. Butler's readings. He did not entirely neglect his New York friends. Especially he kept in touch with Evert Duyckinck in chatty letters. "Mrs. Butler too I have heard at her Readings," he wrote. "She makes a glorious Lady Macbeth but her Desdemona seems like a boarding school miss. She's so unfemininely masculine that had she not, on unimpeachable authority, borne children, I should be curious to learn the result of a surgical examination of her person in private. The Lord help Butler... I marvel not he seeks being amputated off from his maternal half."

This is Melville's earliest known comment on Pierce Butler's divorce trial. When he came to write his caustic caricature in *The Confidence-Man* seven years later, he had had ample opportunity to verify and extend his first impressions of Mrs. Butler. The various aspects of the divorce were sensational news in 1849. Mrs. Butler capitalized the notoriety with triumphant tours of readings. She made her home in Lenox, only about five miles from Arrowhead, near Pittsfield, where the Melvilles went to live in 1850. Thus Melville and the notorious

lady were neighbors for the six years preceding the writing of *The Confidence-Man*, though much of this time Mrs. Butler was away on tour in the various states or in Europe. During the months of Melville's greatest intimacy with the Hawthornes at Lenox, Mrs. Butler was a visitor to the Hawthorne home on her horseback rides over the countryside.

At the very time Melville was at work on *The Confidence-Man*, Mrs. Butler and her unfortunate domestic affairs were again recalled to his mind. Pierce Butler had been granted custody of the two daughters. In the spring of 1856, Sarah, the older daughter, reached her majority and became free from the dominance of her father. This daughter, just at her "coming out" age, and Fanny Kemble—for thus, of course, she was known on the European stage—fresh from the heady intoxicant of European theatrical glory, met in Boston and went together to Lenox to plunge into an active social whirl. Fanny Kemble's home in Lenox, "The Perch," became the gathering place for friends and admirers, young and old. The robust, tireless Fanny organized games and dances in "her own inimitable way," as one commentator observed. The newspapers made a great flurry of such society "copy."

That Melville did not like the particular inimitable way of Fanny Kemble is certain. His sympathy seven years before had been entirely with Pierce Butler. All that the intervening years had shown him of the famous actress had but intensified his earlier impression. Fanny Kemble was a masculine woman: a Lady Macbeth rather than a gentle Desdemona. Even her friends and sympathizers commented upon this quality. In her girlhood she had been trained in posture by a sergeant of the Royal Foot Guards until she had "well-placed shoulders, an erect head, upright carriage, and resolute step." The variability of her features and the paradox involved in her appearance were sources of perplexity to her intimates, as well as to casual acquaintances. Elizabeth Browning called her "inelastic" and "unpliant", and said that her milk had not had time to stand to cream in happy family relations. She was neither genial nor generous in temper. Smallpox had marked her face and "left her complexion thick and muddy and her features heavy and coarse. . . . Sometimes her features looked clear and smooth; on

other occasions, the markings were noticeable and her complexion, muddy." An old friend of hers, Mrs. Fitzhugh, exclaimed one day: "Fanny Kemble, you are the ugliest and the handsomest woman in London."

When Melville ascribed to Goneril, the woman of his story, an "Indian figure" and said that she had "hard, steady health like a squaw's," he was presenting an aspect of Fanny Kemble's life which must have caused him some amazement. He also remarked that Goneril had some other points which were "likewise such as pertain to the women of savage life." Fanny Kemble's robust health, inexhaustible energy, and thoroughly individualistic nature, led her into activities which in an age of Victorian decorum were considered decidedly unfeminine. She rode astride on a strong beautiful horse, often doing ten or twelve miles before breakfast. She rambled on foot or on horseback over the Berkshire mountains, climbing to topmost crags. She fished from eight in the morning to sunset, wearing blouse, trousers, boots, and a man's hat, activities and dress which, according to a letter by James Fenimore Cooper, "made a great deal of *Cancan*." She even excelled in archery, a sport not unassociated with Indians.

Melville in caricaturing Fanny Kemble did not need to stretch credulity. He needed only to sharpen some lines and omit or subdue others. The temper of the actress also furnished him with the materials for his Goneril. He added enough vitriol to sharpen the impressions, enough to show some personal antipathy. Certainly Fanny Kemble was not the kind of woman to win Melville's admiration. Her pronounced personal characteristics could easily be viewed in different lights. She was without question emphatic in speech, dominant in manner, frank, individualistic. These qualities, given differing interpretations, by friend or foe, become diverse in proportion and significance. Frankness can be honesty on the one hand or cruelty on the other. When Melville viewed these qualities—and others—he voiced his extreme disapproval.

A recent sympathetic biographer of Fanny Kemble, Leota S. Driver, has summed up her temper:

Temperamentally she was impulsive, self-willed, and individualistic. Proud of spirit, conscientious perhaps to a fault, she refused

compromise with anything which she conceived to be wrong. To her, integrity was a virtue beyond comparison. Something about her escapes definition. No label places her, no characterization satisfies. An indefinable quality constitutes her supreme charm.

Melville assuredly responded to no such supreme charm, nor would he have approved of such an evaluation. Yet the direct presentation of qualities, such as her impulsive, self-willed, individualistic, stubborn nature—all these certainly he would have accepted. And these were precisely the qualities other people saw in Fanny Kemble. One spoke of her "cleverness and audacity, refinement and coarseness, modesty and bounce, pretty humility and prettier arrogance." A close friend and ardent admirer, Charles Greville, wrote in his diary: "With all her prodigious talents, her fine feelings, noble sentiments, and lively imagination, she has no tact, no judgment, or discretion. She has acted like a fool...." She was outspoken, but never in praise. She was cold and cutting. She was direct and vigorous.

This—all this, and much more—was the woman Melville so harshly and baldly caricatured in his character of Goneril. With a stabbing satire reminiscent of Swift, Melville thrust barb after barb at her. She kept looking steadily "out of her large, metallic eyes, which her enemies called cold as a cuttle-fish's, but which by her were esteemed gazelle-like; for Goneril was not without vanity." "Those who suffered from Goneril's strange nature, might, with one of those hyperboles to which the resentful incline, have pronounced her some kind of toad; but her worst slanderers could never, with any show of justice, have accused her of being a toady. In a large sense she possessed the virtue of independence of mind....Like an icicle-dagger, Goneril at once stabbed and froze."

Melville not only made use of Fanny Kemble as the basis for Goneril; he also used the proceedings of her divorce and the circumstances leading up to it as the brief narrative in which Goneril figures. That is, he used a definitely biased interpretation of the celebrated case. The newspapers of 1849 gave more than generous notice to the domestic disharmony of the Pierce Butlers. Melville followed closely the general pattern of the scandalous tale, except as the outcome needed to be modified to fit the pattern of his total structure in *The Confidence-Man*. The use he made of the tale required that it be told from the hus-

band's point of view. Melville waxed so enthusiastic in meeting the needs of this point of view that Goneril appears little short of monstrous.

Melville called his chapter the "Story of the Unfortunate Man," though the unnamed husband of Goneril is completely over-shadowed by his brutish and violent wife. In a like way Pierce Butler brought divorce proceedings against his wife, but she soon had stolen the whole show, both in the court room and in the press. He became an "also ran." Melville's tale presents two reasons for violent quarrels between the unfortunate man and Goneril, both of which entered into the press accounts of the Butler family. Goneril "had a strange way of touching, as by accident, the arm or hand of comely young men, and seemed to reap a secret delight from it.... of having given the evil-touch ...." The second cause of dissension given is the child, a little girl of seven: "When he saw Goneril artfully torment the little innocent, and then play the maternal hypocrite with it, the unfortunate man's patient long-suffering gave way."

Melville makes a pun on this strange touching of young men which he attributes to Goneril. "All this," he wrote, "was sad—a touching case...." The unfortunate man could not endure to see Goneril bestowing her mysterious favors. It is true that Fanny Kemble exercised a fascination over many different young men, some of whom in company would sit at her feet and in other ways give evidence of their attachment. And Pierce Butler was exceedingly jealous of her friendships. He insisted at one point in their disagreements that his wife sign a pledge: "I promise to give up all intercourse whatever, whether by word or letter, with every member of the Sedgwick family, and hereafter I will treat them in every respect as if I had never known them." Charles Sedgwick was one of her young men, a friend and adviser. Pierce Butler could not endure the presence of these friends of his wife; hence he almost cut himself off from social events at which she was present. This situation in the Butler family was the basis for Melville's picture.

"Needless to say what distress was the unfortunate man's," Melville wrote, "when, engaged in conversation with company, he would suddenly perceive his Goneril bestowing her mysterious touches.... In these cases, too, the unfortunate man could

never endure so much as to look upon the touched young gentleman afterward, fearful of the mortification of meeting in his countenance some kind of more or less quizzingly-knowing expression. He would shudderingly shun the young gentleman. So that here, to the husband, Goneril's touch had the dread operation of the heathen taboo."

The unfortunate man might, out of respect for his marriage vows, have endured this unnatural situation had it not been unnaturally complicated by Goneril's attitude toward the girl. The devil of jealousy entered her, "a calm, clayey, cakey devil, for none other could possess her, and the object of that deranged jealousy, her own child, a little girl of seven, her father's consolation and pet." The honest and well-meaning unfortunate man considered it his duty to withdraw the child from Goneril, even though he could not avoid accompanying the child into domestic exile.

Butler had exercised his legal right to deny Fanny Kemble the care of her children. One incident, in which the governess, following the father's orders, forbade the girls the chance to speak to their mother in the streets of Philadelphia, was taken up by the press. Butler affirmed that it was in relation to the children that Fanny Kemble showed in her worst light. "Try as he might he had never been able to convince her that children belonged, not to their mother, but to their father. She was forever interfering with his regulations for his children's welfare, and giving unasked-for advice as to their food, clothes and education, and....governess...." He had essentially separated himself from Fanny Kemble as a husband long before he brought legal action. He had built separate quarters for her on the family estate, to remove the children from her. Hence he had, as Melville described the situation of the unfortunate man, accompanied the child into domestic exile. When Fanny Kemble realized that she was estranged hopelessly from her husband and her daughters, she went to Europe to continue her stage career.

Butler delayed action for two years before he sought divorce. When he did act, the question at issue seemed to him obviously, "whether a wife is justified in deserting the habitation of her husband and children because she claims a care and control

over them which he sees proper to reserve to himself." The legal language involved in the case may have had some influence on Melville, though he had ample opportunity to develop a personal dislike for Fanny Kemble. The wife was charged with a "wilful and malicious desertion, without reasonable cause, of her husband and his habitation, persisted in for two years." The fact of absence was apparent. But Fanny Kemble maintained that she had reasonable cause for absence. She prepared a "Narrative" of her domestic life with Pierce Butler which aimed to show that reasonable cause. Her "Narrative," a sixty-page frank discussion of domestic strife, was sensational in its effect upon America. The validity of introducing the "Narrative" as evidence was challenged in the court. Before Judge Edward King and a crowded court room, Rufus Choate, one of the ablest of American trial lawyers, Fanny Kemble's counsel, delivered a brilliant four-hour plea in behalf of accepting as evidence this version of her married life. The court ruled against admitting it, but the public press did not. The complete "Narrative" was printed in many daily papers and the people of America rendered their opinion. Fanny Kemble was vindicated by most women, regardless of what men thought.

At the time of the trial Melville lived in New York with a house full of women—his wife, his brother's wife, his mother, his four sisters—, and his *Confidence-Man* narrative contains this biographically interesting sentence, which he might have written with a wry, reminiscent smile: "Whereupon the whole female neighborhood, who till now had little enough admired dame Goneril, broke out in indignation against a husband, who, without assigning a cause, could deliberately abandon the wife of his bosom, and sharpen the sting to her, too, by depriving her of the solace of retaining her offspring."

The husband of Melville's tale is not characterized at all. Melville probably never met Pierce Butler. Yet in external circumstances the two agree; in fact, almost all that Melville wrote of the unfortunate man could have been said of Butler. With Christian charity toward Goneril, he long kept silent concerning her aberrations, but when he spoke he put forth the plea of mental derangement of Goneril as the only explanation that could reasonably be made of her actions. Such charges recoiled on himself. The whole affair left him penniless and outcast, the



victim of a thorough blasting of his private reputation. But throughout the brief episode of *The Confidence-Man* Melville is interested in focusing attention upon Goneril.

The fact that Melville was writing about one of his contemporaries has, I think, not been observed by critics. They have been almost in entire agreement in considering *The Confidence-Man* as the outgrowth of Melville's too intense searchings of his own soul. Mr. Willard Thorp wrote: "Finally, in *The Confidence-Man*, in bitterness and indecision, Melville for the moment gives up in despair, doubting whether there is enough of the indispensable stuff of confidence in the hearts of men to make it possible for them to fuse into a decent social order. . . . *The Confidence-Man* marks the nadir of disillusionment to which he had sunk in 1857." The late William Ellery Sedgwick, author of the most recent study of Melville, agreed thoroughly with this "nadir of disillusionment" idea, and wrote, "In *The Confidence-Man*, written in 1856, we see him sick at heart and sick in soul."

The episode of *The Confidence-Man* involving Goneril and her husband is only a small part of the book; but it, at least, shows Melville looking outwardly at the drama of life around him rather than like a hibernating bear sucking his paws in bitter discontent. It is certainly true that his humor was grim and that he expressed his disapproval with considerable sharpness. But through his works he is frank and outspoken. He did not like Fanny Kemble and did not hesitate to say so.

However, he used the story of Goneril as a part of his general theme throughout the book. After one of the characters of *The Confidence-Man* related the story of the luckless husband and his savage, unfeminine wife, two characters discuss the affair in genial philosophical banter. They acknowledge that the story, told from the point of view of the unfortunate man, does not represent the entire truth. Goneril had not had fair play. "The truth probably was that she was a wife with some blemishes, mixed with some beauties. But when the blemishes were displayed, her husband, no adept in the female nature, had tried to use reason with her, instead of something far more persuasive. Hence his failure to convince and convert."

This statement brings into focus the two opposites around

which Melville built most of *The Confidence-Man*. The husband of Goneril tried to use reason with her when he should have used something far more persuasive—love. The real weakness of Goneril was a lack of love. The entire description of her person and temper emphasizes that coldness and hardness which is the opposite of love. Her Indian figure, the cactus-like quality of her beauty, her cold, metallic eyes, the hardness of her health, the firmness of her resolution—all are foreign to love and femininity. She did not have that warmth and sympathy which are associated with the heart. There, too, lies the failure of the husband. He tried reason, instead of the greater persuasive powers of understanding and love.

Melville drew upon the figure of a great battle during the Crimean War to point up this difference, such a testing of an abstract principle by application to the particular and immediate as he often used. "In short," he wrote, "with all sorts of cavillers, it was best, both for them and everybody, that whoever had the true light should stick behind the secure Malakoff of confidence, nor be tempted forth to hazardous skirmishes on the open ground of reason." A little reasoning or philosophizing may with safety be indulged, but one should not unadvisedly give way to reason. Scattered in various ways throughout much of Melville's work is that antithetical arrangement of "heart" and "head." His own position was always clear. "I stand for the heart," he emphatically declared. "To the dogs with the head!" His caricature of Fanny Kemble is aimed at presenting a Goneril who is entirely lacking in those qualities of heartiness, personal warmth, spontaneity, enthusiasm, and genuine humanitarian sympathy which he associated with the quality of the "heart." The Goneril of *The Confidence-Man* grew out of Melville's knowledge of Fanny Kemble, not out of disillusionment.

## *Walt Whitman's "Passage to India"*

**W**ALT WHITMAN (1819-1892), the American poet of a mystical, absorbing, all-embracing concept of democracy and the total common man, was one of the first literary figures in the Western World to embrace in spirit the whole world and to have a vision of a world united in common humanity. Such an all-enfolding concept as he had is the more remarkable because he did not ever travel outside of the United States, and even there most of his life was spent in a relatively small area around New York City and New Jersey. However, he like the Concord philosopher, Henry David Thoreau, knew how to extend his mind beyond geographical limitations.

While Emerson and Thoreau had read very widely in Asian as well as European literature, Whitman could better be described as a smatterer of literature, a taster of it, a dabbler in it, than as a serious or genuine reader of world literature. His alert mind was quick to reach out over the far seas and grab the larger concepts, and hence his writings are filled with off-hand and familiar references to Mecca, Zoroaster, "Old Brahm," the Hebrew lyre, Faust, mosques, temples, the gods of Egypt, Confucius, and all those elements of man's ancient and larger beliefs and faiths. But his real approach to the larger world was not through his mind but through his heart. He had a "feeling" about the world. Even as he would "loaf at ease" and observe a spear of summer grass, inviting his soul, so also he permitted his soul to loaf at ease over the world, stimulated into activity by the stirring events of the expanding world of his own day.

He was present on Broadway in New York City when the first Japanese Embassy came to the new world and were greeted in a day of pageantry and parade, and he was thrilled at this heralding of a new day in the bringing together of the Old World and the New.<sup>1</sup> In poem after poem, as in "Years of the Modern" and "Facing West from California's Shores," his vision reached out across the oceans for the ancient lands of Asia which were becoming the new lands of our century, until, finally, in his mind, the seas were all crossed.

Whitman was directed in 1869 and 1870 toward this contemplation of a united world by three related and momentous events: the completion of a railroad across the North American continent from east to west; the laying of the transatlantic cable; and the opening of the Suez Canal. All three of these engineering and scientific achievements of man brought the distant near and welded the distant lands together.

These three separate achievements brought to completion man's age old longing toward finding an easier passage to India. Within a year the great water parade of the garlanded ships of the commercial nations of the world opened the water route eastward to India with pomp and ceremony; and the breaking of champagne bottles, the touching of engines, the driving of a golden spike at Promontory, Utah, amidst speeches and the waving of flags, completed the dream of Columbus and gave mankind a safe and easy westward passage to India.

This all, to Whitman, was a fulfilment of God's purpose from the first, that the earth should be spanned and connected by networks of communication and that all races and nations should be neighbors. Out of Whitman's reflection on these advances in man's scientific achievement came his significant poem, "Passage to India." He had a great theme and a broad vista'd subject; and his life and writings up to that time had prepared him to deal greatly with his feeling that this historic sequence of events was more than material. He knew also that God purposed and mankind sought a oneness on a more valuable and abiding plane.

His way was the way of the religious accepter. He did

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1. His poem, "A Broadway Pageant," celebrates this historic event.

not argue: he knew. He says to any man or woman, "Let your soul stand cool and composed before a million universes." God was to him not a subject for disputation, but for contemplation: "I hear and behold God in every object, yet understand God not in the least. . . ." "Why should I wish to see God better than this day?"<sup>2</sup> Wearing his hat indoors or out, just as he pleased, without veneration or ceremonial,<sup>3</sup> accepting the Reality of the world<sup>4</sup>, and seeing the great worth of all people as equal to his own solid and secure place in the order of things,<sup>5</sup> he felt around him "the peace and knowledge that pass all the argument of the earth."<sup>6</sup>

In the ebb and flow of the tides and in the pulsing life of mankind in the busy streets of a great city<sup>7</sup> he understood the mystical acceptance of mankind's fundamental oneness, and before the greatness of that conception we see his magnificent whiskered figure stand, at ease, hat tipped back on his head, his shirt open at the throat, his head jauntily to one side as a hand rested lightly on his hip. It is certain that this Whitman came in an unusually complete way to feet "aplomb in the midst of irrational things" as he, imperturbable, stood "at ease in Nature."<sup>8</sup>

Outwardly the thrust of his sympathy took him over "the boundless blue . . . to every sea," as he put himself in the position of the world's mariners:

The sky o'erarches here, we feel the undulating deck  
beneath our feet,  
We feel the long pulsation, ebb and flow of endless motion,  
The tones of unseen mystery, the vague and vast suggestions  
of the briny world, the liquid-flowing syllables,  
The perfume, the faint creaking of the cordage, the melan-  
choly rhythm,  
The boundless vista and the horizon far and dim....<sup>9</sup>

Whitman, in "Passage to India," was ready for the boundless vista and the far horizon.

2. Three quotations from Section 48 of "Song of Myself."

3. Ibid. Section 20.

4. Ibid. Section 23.

5. Ibid. Section 20.

6. Ibid. Section 5.

7. "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry."

8. "Me Imperturbe."

9. "In Cabin'd Ships at Sea."

There are three significant vistas which Whitman plumbs as he sits in his little frame cottage in a plain, common neighborhood of Camden, New Jersey, in 1870, and sends his intuitive and imaginative mind out over the world: first, the past must be harmonized and understood as a part of the present, that is, the significant and purposeful sweep of history must be imaginatively comprehended, second, the geography of the world needs to be brought into unity, regional geopolitics must have no place in the dramatic vision; third, man stands on the shores of the misty seas of the future but the poet with boldness of vision and perfect aplomb strides forward to shed faith and light over the direction for mortals to follow.

The Past—the dark unfathom'd retrospect!  
 The teeming gulf—the sleepers and the shadows!  
 The past—the infinite greatness of the past!  
 For what is the present after all but a growth out of the past?

Going back to the past of the world Whitman saw must necessarily mean going into the heart of Asia, and especially to India, to "myths and fables of old, Asia's, Africa's fables" Here among the "deep diving bibles and legends," the "temples fairer than lilies" and the "lofty and dazzling towers" burnished in gold, one finds the ancient spirit of man "eluding the hold of the known" and "mounting to heaven."

Down from the gardens of Asia descending radiating,  
 Adam and Eve appear, then their myriad progeny after them  
 Wandering, yearning, curious, with restless explorations  
 With questionings, baffled, formless, feverish, with never-happy  
 hearts,  
 With that sad incessant refrain, *Wherefore unsatisfied soul? and*  
*Whither O mocking life?*

Following with striking phrase and daring figure the course of mankind through the ages as the striving and restlessly seeking soul of man surges onward, Whitman finds part of the purpose of God, the destiny of history, in the bringing of the whole world together into the final oneness of the "vast Rondure, swimming in space"—

With inscrutable purpose, some hidden prophetic intention...  
 Lo, soul, seest thou not God's purpose from the first?  
 The earth to be spann'd, connected by network,  
 The races, neighbors, to marry and be given in marriage,

The oceans to be cross'd, the distant brought near,  
The lands to be welded together.

This purpose working itself out in history has involved the struggles of many captains, the tale "of many a sailor dead," but along all history, even as a rivulet runs down a gentle mountain slope, there has been the ceaseless forward march,

The plans, the voyages again, the expeditions,  
Again Vasco de Gama sails forth,  
Again the knowledge gain'd, the mariners compass,  
Lands found and nations born, thou born America,  
For purpose vast, man's long probation fill'd,  
Thou rondure of the world at last accomplish'd.

But "after the seas are all cross'd (as they seem already cross'd)" still remains the great spiritual question of man and the earth.

Ah who shall soothe these feverish children?  
Who justify their restless explorations?  
Who speak the secret of the impassive earth?

Now in the new age of mankind's common habitation of the one vast world, we understand the past and look toward the future. Do we look into those misty and uncertain years with fears and misgivings? Whitman did not. It would be reasonable to say that he understood the nature of man and the pitfalls of the world very well. He was not only the imaginative poet; also he had been government employee, a nurse to wounded soldiers in war, and he was the author of *Democratic Vistas*, a very critical analysis of the moral lapses of a democratic society.

Yet his look toward the future was as buoyant and optimistic as had been his earlier stirring "Song of the Open Road." His view of the future has both earthly and spiritual facts.

In his longer beautiful poem "By Blue Ontario's Shore," written in 1856, in which he presents his conception of the role of the poet, he sees the poet as sage and guide for mankind.

...the poet is the equable man...  
He bestows on every object or quality its fit proportion...,  
He is the arbiter of the diverse, he is the key,  
He is the equalizer of the age and land,  
He supplies what wants supplying, he checks what wants checking

And now, now that the seas are all cross'd,

Finally shall come the poet worthy that name,

'The true son of God shall come singing his songs, ..  
 All these hearts as of fretted children shall be sooth'd,  
 All affection shall be fully responded to, the secret shall be told,  
 All these separations and gaps shall be taken up and hook'd and  
 link'd together  
 The whole earth, this cold, impassive, viceless earth, shall be  
 completely justified,  
 Trinitas divine shall be gloriously accomplish'd and compacted by  
 the true son of God, the poet,  
 (He shall indeed pass the straits and conquer the mountains,  
 He shall double the Cape of Good Hope to some purpose,)  
 Nature and Man shall be disjoin'd and diffused no more,  
 The true son of God shall absolutely fuse them.

Thus the lodestone of India, attracting the Western World  
 to seek a passage to India and the ancient spiritual depths of the  
 East, are purposefully fused in our day and from this vantage  
 point of understanding the purpose and force of history man can  
 hopefully and confidently face the future. Indeed at home in  
 the world at last, mankind need feel no fears of the universe.  
 Although man shrivels at the thought of God and the boundless  
 space, still he need not fear, and Whitman uses a daring and  
 reassuring figure to relate the world to the universe, man to god,  
 "as fill'd with friendship, love complete, The Elder Brother found,  
 the Younger melts in fondness in his arms."

The passage is more than a passage to India. Man with his  
 infinite reaches of spiritual power may take passage to the secret  
 of earth and sky, and to whatever the outward and onward has  
 in store for him. Nothing holds him back but his own unwilling-  
 ness to launch out. Whitman's own blood was burning for  
 passage.

Away O soul! hoist instantly the anchor!  
 Cut the hawsers—haul out—shake out every sail!  
 Have we not stood here like trees on the ground long enough?

Aplomb, imperturbable? eager, he stood on the shores of  
 eternity as he stood on the shores of the world, calling in brave  
 courage,

Sail forth—steer for the deep waters only...  
 O my brave soul;  
 O farther farther sail;  
 O daring joy, but safe, are they not all the seas of God?  
 O farther, farther, farther sail.



# *“The Seas Are All Cross’d”:* *Whitman and World* *Freedom*

**I**N 1860 the First Embassy from the Shogun of Japan to the United States crossed the Pacific Ocean and gave to millions of democracy-loving Americans an opportunity to gawk at, marvel over, and revel in the pomp and dress parade and authority of the Ancient East. The chief ambassador, Shimmi, headed a party of about four score persons, a vice-ambassador, a censor, minor officials, interpreters, three physicians, barbers, pike bearers, and various body servants and attendants.

The group left Japan on February 13, stopped at the Hawaiian Islands and San Francisco, crossed the Isthmus of Panama by train, and sailed to New York for a brief pause before making the official entry to Washington. For seven weeks during late April, May, and early June the American press gave great attention to these visitors from another world. Washington, Baltimore and Philadelphia poured out immense masses of humanity to catch glimpses of the representatives of the mysterious East and the ancient island kingdom which Commodore Perry had entered only a few years before.

But the New York celebration and the Broadway parade was then, as now, the climax of the American visit. As one Japanese writer put it, they “were received with all that kindness of heart and freak of fancy could devise to honor and salute them.” The year 1860 did not provide the ticker-tape snowfall, but it

did supply a rousing parade. Over half the city's 800,000 population lined the streets, covered the housetops, jammed the windows, filled the temporary bleachers, and clung in the branches of trees, shouting their welcomes and waving flags, banners, and handkerchiefs or hats. All stores and shops were closed for the occasion and Japanese and American flags by the thousand gave a colorful, festive background to such banners as "The Jubilee of the World is at Hand" and "Freedom for the World."

The expectant city waited for hours while the New York dignitaries dined and wined the important guests out in the harbor. A cannon salute greeted the landing of the party. Sixty-five open carriages were waiting to carry the visitors and their hosts. Seven thousand bright uniformed militiamen and the New York police force furnished an escort. Every band in the country played "Hail, Columbia." The visiting ambassador was three hours in getting from the Battery to Union Square. Here was an American welcome to the East, a genuine Broadway pageant.

One of the American spectators on that memorable occasion was Walt Whitman. He was seeing the rising sun, the beginning of a new day in the world. This Broadway pageant to him was symbolic of the destiny of history, for to America, at last, the Orient had come. Here, indeed, in Whitman's eyes was a day to set apart, and he wrote his richly imaged poem "A Broadway Pageant," raising his voice as one joining the ranks of the chanters of the essential harmony in the world, the union of the East and the West.

Whitman, like the other spectators, curiously gazed upon

the swart-cheek'd two-sworded envoys,  
Leaning back in their open barouches, bare-headed, impassive...

He, too, was interested in the pomp and display, the thunder-cracking, fire-flashing guns saluting, in the name of the new democracy, the envoys of the ancient feudal East; the myriad flags flying from the forested masts in the harbor; the pennant-hung streets and the festooned windows dressed with gay colors; and the crowds of people—tens of thousands of eyes all focused on the guests from the far islands.

Here were the antipodes come together, meeting in the shaded streets of Manhattan. Here, for Whitman, was more than the Nippon envoys come over the Western sea: here was the Orient, the East, "The nest of languages, the bequeather of poems, . . . the race of Brahma." Here appears the lithe and silent Hindoo, "the murky night-morning of wonder and fable inscrutable," the Asiatic continent itself—all these and more are in the pageant-procession, bringing together the East and the West, remaking the geography of the world. Here was the answer that had awaited thousands of years.

In an outburst of prophetic imagination of which few people then living would have been capable (and many now living do not yet see) Whitman threw into one of his free-flowing poetic paragraphs his analysis of what the young American democracy, the fount and bestower of liberty, was facing from its Western golden shores. The countries there with their massed millions of population are curiously here also. There is no Chinese wall of separation, but from this day commencing the renewed Asia and the reborn races and the New World are woven together and united. And Whitman, with the kind of inclusiveness which marks many of his American poems, calls the roll of Asia and extends his warm-hearted grasp of fellowship.

The swarming market places, the temples with bronze idols, Brahmin, lama, mandarin, farmer, fisherman, mechanic, dancing girl and singing girl, mystic and emperor, Confucius himself, the great poets, all castes, crowding up from all directions, from Tibet, from the four great rivers of China, from Malaysia and the islands—all these, and more, "are seiz'd by me, and I am seiz'd by them, and friendlily held by them."

Here is American democracy in the middle, between the two oceans, well poised, where it shall remain for thousands and thousands of years, welcoming from the one side the nobles of Asia and from the other side the eldest son of the queen of England. The world is enclosed: it is a circle—not yet entirely united—"The box lid is but perceptibly open'd, nevertheless the perfume pours copiously out of the whole box." The venerable Asia, the all-mother, has come, Whitman says, giving a word of warning

and entreaty to his countrymen:

Bend your proud neck to the long-off mother now sending  
 messages over the archipelagoes to you,  
 Bend your proud neck low for once, young Libertad.

The oldest idea connected with America is that of a route to unite it with the Orient—a passage to India. Not only Columbus, but also Hudson, and Lewis and Clark, and John Jacob Astor, and John C. Fremont were interested in that elusive passage to the fabled wealth and mystery of the East. This dream of some highway to Asia across America—whether by horseback, wagon, boat, or railroad—was a dominant idea for three generations of Americans who faced westward before the golden spike was driven at Promontory, Utah, in 1869, uniting the Atlantic and Pacific by rail.

Timothy Dwight not only could write of inhaling, “from proud Nanking, a sip of tea,” but, more important, he could, in the first decade of the new nation’s life, see the two antipodal cultures. In his vision of commerce on the Pacific in “Greenfield Hill,” written in 1787 and published in 1794, Dwight says that “the starr’d ensign [shall] court Korean gales.” (Is this the earliest mention of Korea in American literature?) The new spirit of the new day shall extend over Asia,

Man link to man; with bosom bosom twine;  
 And one great bond the house of Adam join.

Philip Freneau was interested in the westward thrust of man’s vision and wrote of the new day coming similar to “those days of felicity... which are so beautifully described by the prophetic sages of ancient times.” Thomas Jefferson at one time drew up plans for an approach to the Pacific Northwest by going eastward through Siberia. He intended that the adventurous explorer John Ledyard, of Connecticut, should undertake this exploratory journey. Jefferson also instructed Meriwether Lewis for his overland journey to Oregon and the Pacific:

The object of your mission is to explore the Missouri river, and such principal streams of it as, by its course and communication with the waters of the Pacific Ocean, may offer the most direct and practicable communication across this continent, for the purposes of commerce

When it was demonstrated in 1823 that wagons could be driven to

Oregon, Caleb Atwater of Ohio declared, "That will be the route to China within fifty years from this time"

Thomas Hart Benton, for decades the United States senator from Missouri, clamored most persistently for federal attention to the possibilities of transcontinental traffic. However, he had his roots so firmly fixed in the mid-American river systems that he thought only in terms of water travel. He thought that the Arkansas, Platte, Yellowstone, and Missouri rivers could in some way be connected by canals across the Rocky Mountains to the rivers emptying into the Pacific, to establish "lines of communication with eastern Asia, and channels for that rich commerce which, for forty centuries, has created so much wealth and power wherever it has flowed." Benton insisted that the American transcontinental route to the Orient would become the European route also and that the commerce of the world would thus flow across this continent. Nowhere, he maintained, had that commerce of the East flowed without bringing with it not only wealth but also high attainments in arts, letters, and science.

Asa Whitney, an American business man who spent six years between 1838 and 1844 in the Orient as a mercantile agent, acquiring wealth in the process, devoted himself to fostering a transcontinental railroad as an adjunct to Asiatic trade. He, too, saw America as the mid-link in the united world: "Here we stand forever; we reach out one hand to all Asia, and the other to all Europe."

William Gilpin, a rhapsodic Westerner, also saw the Pacific railway as an invaluable link in the cultural development of the world:

The *untransacted* destiny of the American people is to subdue the continent—to rush over this vast field to the Pacific Ocean—to animate the many hundred millions of its people, and to cheer them upward...—to teach old nations a new civilization...—to perfect science—to emblazon history with the conquest of peace...—to unite the world in one social family—to dissolve the spell of tyranny and exalt charity—to absolve the curse that weighs down humanity, and to shed blessings round the world!

Herman Melville said that it was California that first brought the Pacific Ocean home to the great body of Anglo-Saxons. Certainly the "flashing and golden pageant of Cali-

formia" held Walt Whitman's attention as he chanted the "Song of the Redwood-Tree" and envisioned "a swarming and busy race settling and organizing everywhere" and establishing a bond of peaceful commerce "to India and China and Australia and the thousand island paradises of the Pacific." In the "Song of the Exposition" this image was continued until he saw "This earth all spann'd with iron rails, with lines of steamships threading every sea, our own rondure, the current globe."

In the decade which included the American Civil War, America and the world were stirring into a new and broader consciousness in which the techniques of industrial civilization as though with myriad tiny threads were weaving the web of destiny. Walt Whitman, in the midst of it, bare-throated and open-handed, stood ready to salute the world ("Salut au Monde!")

What widens within you Walt Whitman? ..  
 What elimes? what persons and cities are here? ..  
 Within me latitude widens, longitude lengthens,  
 Asia, Africa, Europe, are to the East ..  
 Within me zones, seas, cataracts, forests, volcanoes, groups,  
 Malaysia, Polynesia, and the great West Indian islands.

He asks, "What do you hear Walt Whitman? What do you see Walt Whitman?" And he answers that he saw all of the rising multitudes of the earth, the individuals which make up the human family, and he said,

And I salute all the inhabitants of the earth .  
 Health to you ! good will to you all, from me and  
 America sent !  
 Each of us inevitable,  
 Each of us limitless—each of us with his or her  
 right upon the earth,  
 Each of us allow'd the eternal purports of the earth,  
 Each of us here as divinely as any is here.

This new world of Whitman's vision is analyzed again in "Years of the Modern," where the restive earth confronts the new era. Not America alone but also other nations united under Liberty's banner are preparing—

I see tremendous entrances and exits, new combinations,  
 the solidarity of races,  
 I see that force advancing with irresistible power on  
 the world's stage,...

I see Freedom, completely arm'd and victorious and very  
 haughty, with Law on one side and Peace on the other,  
 A stupendous trio all issuing forth against the idea of caste.

The years of the modern are the time of the energetic average man,

His daring foot is on land and sea everywhere, .  
 With the steamship, the electric telegraph, the newspaper,.  
 With these and the world-spreading factories he interlinks all  
 geography, all lands,  
 What whispers are these O lands, running ahead of you,  
 passing under the seas?  
 Are all nations communing? is there going to be but  
 one heart to the globe?  
 Is humanity forming en-masse? for lo, tyrants tremble,  
 crowns grow dim,  
 The earth, restive, confronts the new era...

To America—the United States—he gives pre-eminent place in the new world vision. Whitman was filled with the buoyantly optimistic humanitarian spirit of America, where the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights had lighted a torch of liberty to burn as a signal to the world. America was the pioneer in freedom, in liberty, in the place and dignity of the common man. America must be sure of itself, careful and steady, for the sake of the whole world.

Herman Melville, who was born in the same year as Whitman and grew to manhood on Manhattan Island, neighboring Whitman's Long Island, gave emphatic expression to this importance of American political leadership to the rest of the world. Chapter thirty-six of *White-Jacket* is a remarkable literary expression of the American political dream realizing itself in world freedom:

There are occasions when it is for America to make precedents, and not to obey them. We should, if possible, prove a teacher to posterity...

We Americans are the peculiar chosen people—the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world...God has predestinated, mankind expects, great things from our race;...we are the pioneers of the world:...Long enough have we been sceptics with regard to ourselves, and doubted whether, indeed, the political Messiah had come. But he has come in *us*, if we would but give utterance to his promptings. And let us always remember that with ourselves, almost for the first time in the history of the earth, national selfishness is unbounded philanthropy; for we cannot do a good to America, but we give alms to the world.

Here is the crux of the matter as Melville, Whitman, and

many another American saw it; the United States, with its concept and practice of freedom, was the political Messiah of the world. Whitman frequently voiced this idea of America's piloting the world toward the great goal. The states must rise "as a strong bird on pinions free" so that "venerable priestly Asia" may profit by its trail breaking. In "Thou Mother with Thy Equal Brood" he declares,

Sail, sail thy best, ship of Democracy,  
Of value is thy freight, 'tis not the Present only,  
The Past is also stored in thee,  
Thou holdest not the venture of thyself alone, not  
of the Western continent alone.  
Earth's *resume* entire floats on thy keel O ship. .;  
Steer then with good strong hand and wary eye  
O helmsman, thou carriest great companions,  
Venerable priestly Asia sails this day with thee,  
And royal feudal Europe sails with thee.

In the "Song of the Broad-Axe" the axe, the symbol of the working man's tool in clearing the earth and building the cities, rising out of the dignity of free labor, cleanses the blood from the axe of the ancient headsman, the symbol of man's degradation and man's inhuman tyranny.

I see the headsman withdraw and become useless,  
I see the scaffold untrodden and mouldy, I see no  
longer any axe upon it,  
I see the mighty and friendly emblem of the power of  
my own race, the newest, largest race.

This latter use of the word *race*, need anyone be warned, is not *race* in any ethnic sense, but rather the "cutters down of wood," the working men of mankind, the shape of humanity formed out of democracy. In "Song of the Redwood-Tree" he sees "In this new world, long in the preparation,"

...the genius of the modern, child of the real  
and ideal,  
Clearing the ground for broad humanity, the true  
America, heir of the past so grand,  
To build a grander future.

Essential to building this grander future—whether Whitman were thinking at the moment of the union of states or of the grand ordure, the world—was the dignity, the worth, the recognition of the individual, as in "By Blue Ontario's Shore":



Underneath all, individuals,  
I swear nothing is good to me now that ignores  
    individuals,  
The American compact is altogether with individuals,  
The whole theory of the universe is directed unerringly  
    to one single individual—namely to You

And, to complete Whitman's picture of the place America inevitably holds in the making of that great new era when Freedom, Law and Peace—all recognizing the place and importance of the individual—would as an invulnerable trio encircle the earth, consider his little poem on an American election, "Election Day, November, 1884." To make Whitman's confidence and assurance the more solid, one should recall that the election was not one to make Americans proud. It followed a period of dirty, bawdy campaigning amid cries of "Rum, Romanism, and Rebellion." Yet Whitman, above all that, could see the millions of free individuals, unchallenged, marking their choices, with the assurance that their combined will would be established. That is the wonder and the glory, the most powerful scene the Western World can show. Not Niagara, the Colorado Canyon, Yosemite, not mountain, or river or natural wonder can compare with America's choosing day—the act itself of choosing, the coming into being of this great instrument and power, this expression of freedom, through law, with peace—the final snowflakes of votes falling, the swordless, peaceful conflict expressing the choice of all. "It serves to purify—while the heart pants, life glows."

As the arrival of the Japanese embassy in New York in 1860 stirred Whitman to the new vision of the Occident and the Orient being brought together across the Pacific Ocean and gave him glimpses of a harmonious world of democratic nations, so ten years later the concatenation of three dramatic events in the making of that new and more united world stimulated one of his greatest poetic expressions in "Passage to India." The Old World of Europe was united to the East by the Suez Canal; the new American continent was spanned by rail, when the Central Pacific and the Union Pacific met at Promontory, Utah, the last rails being laid in place by pigtailed emigrants from Old Cathay; and the "eloquent gentle wires," the Atlantic cable, was laid. Whitman was as always attracted by the pageantry

inherent in such momentous occasions, the historic realization of the "unloos'd dreams," but in this great poem he had small use for contemporary spectacle. He saw the present world as but a growth out of the past and here his vision tried to encompass the unfolding past and project the future. It was a large and magnificent idea sweeping over the centuries and across continents, connecting the myths and fables of old Asia and Africa, the deep diving bibles and wise religions with the great achievements of engineers and light-bringing science.

From the gardens of Asia came Adam and Eve, their descendants moving across the world as mankind surged westward, even to our own day when the drive over the American plains toward the ancient lands was bringing the circle of the world into one whole, thereby fulfilling what now seems to have been God's purpose from the beginning.

After the seas are all cross'd, (as they seem already cross'd),  
After the great captains and engineers have accomplish'd  
their work,...

Finally shall come the poet worthy that name,  
The true son of God shall come singing his songs.

This "true son of God" shall absolutely fuse Nature and man, until fragmentation shall be replaced by the fused, and the disjointed shall give way to the joined. The gifts and insight and splendor of old occult Brahma and the tender and junior Buddha, China's wisdom and the imaginative wonder of Persia and Arabia—all, all shall find their place when

All these separations and gaps shall be taken up and  
hook'd and link'd together,  
The whole earth, this cold, impassive, voiceless earth  
shall be completely justified.

This is the hope Whitman had, buoyantly optimistic and mystical, a generation before the Wright brothers and three generations before Willkie flow over the blue yonder into a dream of one world. Whitman's is the mystical, spiritual vision of the poet and not the practical blueprint of the diplomat. Like the saint and the religious prophet he saw how the world had come to the place in history where the westward thrust had carried around the whole globe, with the road between Europe and Asia crossing the western hemisphere. The United States on the highroad of the world furnished that essential and inevitable ingredient,

the free individual. This has been God's intent. This is the course of history.

Lo, soul, seest thou not God's purpose from the first?  
The earth to be spann'd, connected by network,  
The races, neighbors, to marry and be given in marriage,  
The oceans to be cross'd, the distant brought near,  
The lands to be welded together.

It was never a part of Whitman's nature to say, "Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay." This mystical American democrat was a spokesman for the new day being born. He felt the American sense of destiny which was impelling it westward over the continent and confronting the Pacific, but more than his fellows he sensed the intangible value involved in the merging of cultures. He understood that there is something that does not like a wall—or an iron curtain, or a bamboo curtain—and tries to shake it down. He feared that the era of worldwide wars might be upon man, and yet he pointed toward the balanced trinity, the free individual, in orderly society, under God, exemplifying freedom, law, and peace.

Man's passage is outward to more than India. The way may be hazardous and beset with dangers and be far from clear, but over the dark seas of tomorrow those shores are calling.

Passage to you, your shores, ye aged fierce enigmas!  
Passage to you, to mastership of you, ye strangling  
problems!  
You, strew'd with the wreck of skeletons, that, living,  
never reach'd you.

Though there have been wrecks, and may yet be more wrecks, man can only go forward from where the world is, sailing outward. Whitman's final word, in this poem, and also in his word to the world, is to cease the cautious, fearsome fumbling and to sail forward. Hoist anchor! Cut the hawsers? Sail forth! Steer for the deep waters only.

"Are they not all the seas of God?"

## *Walt Whitman and Asia*

**M**Y class in Whitman for senior and graduate students permits about five weeks for class consideration of him, as he is paired with some other writer, such as Thoreau or Mark Twain, in a quarter's work. The class is usually given in the evening under the Portland Extension Center and includes some high school English teachers, as well as regular students, recent graduates, and various employed adults. We have three class periods combined in one evening, providing an opportunity for an extended consecutive discussion of some aspect of Whitman's work. Naturally the instructor cannot and should not lecture for such a period, nor can the discussion be permitted to drift. The situation calls for controlled sequences of lecture and discussion of pertinent questions.

After the students have read widely in Whitman, including both poems and prose works, and after the class has devoted several weeks to his techniques, purposes, relationships to Transcendentalism, romanticism, politics, the slavery division, and his main drift of ideas, I devote an evening of discussion, that is, three class periods, to the question of Whitman's interest in the Orient.

Is Whitman so preoccupied with American democracy and the development of these states into a nation that he has little attention left for far-away Asia? How widely did he read the Asian literature which was coming to interest not only the Transcendentalists but also many other Americans? Are his references

to Europe and Asia similar in kind? Is he on the defensive against the dependence of America on the European past and present cultural development, while, with that dependence lacking in the relationship of America to Asia, he can look toward Asia with different eyes? What attitudes, what concepts, what purposes toward Asian peoples, literatures, ideas do make appearance in Whitman's writings? If Whitman could write, "The old and moth-eaten systems of Europe have had their day . . .," what would he say of the ancient systems of China and Japan, of Siam, Korea, India?

The protest of Whitman against American cultural preoccupation with the European heritage did not carry over into his concern for Asia and other distant lands and peoples, for there was no umbilical relationship with them to be severed. On the contrary, Whitman's concern for unity, inclusiveness, was impelling him toward both the ancient cultures and the distant cultures. When he asks in "Salut au Monde," "What widens within you, Walt Whitman? . . .What do you see . . .?" he is aware of a universe with distant lands "as real and near to the inhabitants of them as my land is to me. . . ."

While Melville, who had probably seen the coast of Japan, was writing in *Moby-Dick*, "If that double-bolted land, Japan, is ever to become hospitable, it is the whale-ship alone to whom the credit will be due . . .," Whitman was engrossed in nationalism. But the decade of the fifties brought many changes. Commodore Matthew Perry came into the spotlight of history as he met the commissioners of the feudal kingdom of Japan for the first time in a spectacle of splendor on July 14, 1853—the anniversary of Bastille Day. This symbolic day was prophetic of the breaking of Japanese isolation, and in 1860 the first party of Japanese officialdom visited the United States. The chief envoy, Shimmi, headed a party of about four score persons, presenting in focus the elaborately structured class-conscious society of Japan: vice-envoy, censor, minor officials, interpreters, physicians, barbers, pike bearers, servants, attendants. This party left Japan on February 13, 1860, touched at Hawaii, San Francisco, crossed the Isthmus and proceeded to Washington—amidst elaborate newspaper excitement. For many weeks of April, May, and into June the press of America covered in detail

this modern progression of ancient Asia into the very citadel of modern democracy.

The climax of this American visit was the New York welcome to the party, which Whitman witnessed and memorialized in his poem, "A Broadway Pageant." Whitman gave colorful details of the scene unfolding before him; but his concern was with the meeting of East and West, and the more ultimate meaning of that meeting. More than the Nippon envoys was riding up Broadway that day. This was the East, the Orient, "The nest of languages, the bequeather of poems... the race of Brahma...." This unfolding pageant was the new geography, confronting the old and the new. Involved in the meeting was the lithe and silent Hindoo, "the murky night-morning of wonder and fable inscrutable," the Asiatic continent itself. This was what the world had awaited all these thousands of years.

How "real" to Whitman is the East he conjures up in his poetic image? How much does he know of the Asia he embraces? How complete here is his acceptance of Asia, the all-mother? What does he mean by his entreaty to his fellow Americans?

Bend your proud neck to the long-off mother now sending  
messages over the archipelagoes to you,  
Bend your proud neck low for once, young Libertad.

Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land* (1950) contains a good chapter, "Walt Whitman and Manifest Destiny," which, in the context of the volume, places Whitman in relationship to the developing western interest in America. Chapter thirty-six of Melville's *White-Jacket* gives a remarkable literary expression of the American concept of the movement toward political liberty in the world: "We Americans are the peculiar chosen people.... We are the pioneers of the world.... We cannot do a good to America, but we give alms to the world."

The decade of the sixties brought Whitman's move to Washington, his interest in the Civil War, the wounded and sick soldiers, and his struggle for literary recognition. It might be thought that he would have little opportunity for continuing and deepening his feeling toward Asian emanations; but certainly his greatest poetic treatment of the subject came at the end of this decade with his "Passage to India."

Whitman's image sometimes took him to full inclusiveness, as when he saw "This earth all spann'd with iron rails, with lines of steamships threading every sea, our own rondure, the current globe," and when he came to see that "the seas are all cross'd."

How does "Years of the Modern" indicate Whitman's thinking about Asia and what we Americans now rather smugly call the undeveloped countries of the earth? What is the "stupendous trio" which he sees issuing forth "against the idea of caste"? Is this concept of struggle against the idea of caste an inclusion of Asia or an exclusion of it?

Are all nations communing? is there going to be but one heart to the globe?

Is humanity forming en-masse?

"Proud Music of the Storm" presents Whitman as a time-binder, bringing past ages into the present, and relates easily to the ideas of "Passage to India," as Gay Wilson Allen's *Solitary Singer*, chapter IX, section VI, clearly presents. In one great poetic image Whitman embraces the vast rondure, swimming in space, and comprehends the unfolding march of time, as he approaches the question, "*Wherefore unsatisfied soul? and, Whither O mocking life?*"

The religious implications, the meaning of life and death, the way one approaches God with trust in the Elder Brother—all this is a different question from Whitman's concern with affairs Asian; and yet the strands are so interwoven as to be separated only with danger and sacrifice to the comprehension of either facet of Whitman. Whitman was attracted by the inherent pageantry and spectacle involved in such events as the parade of the Japanese party up Broadway. He was naturally excited by the historical events of the completion of the transcontinental railway at Promontory, Utah,—the highway to Asia—and the opening of the Suez Canal, thus circling the earth with transportation lines.

All these separations and gaps shall be taken up and hook'd and link'd together,

The whole earth, this cold, impassive, voiceless earth shall be completely justified.

These events in history are but the outward trappings of greater

and more significant meanings. God's purpose from the first is now making itself clear, now that the seas are all crossed, now that the free American individual furnishes the essential link to the union of the whole.

Modern man has found the passage to India; but India, too, is more than a fact in history for Whitman as he considers man's destiny. He knows that man seeks more than India, and in his poetic vision he sees that man can steer with confidence where all the seas are seas of God.

It is to Asia that Whitman turns for his ultimate spiritual quest. It is through the symbol of Asia that he finds his ultimate poetic expression of that spiritual meaning. His greatest poetic handling of this subject grew out of a large background of interest in and some familiarity with both the real Asia and the rather fanciful Asia which tickled the American consciousness of Whitman's day—the Siamese twins, the opium smokers, the *Arabian Nights*.

The question of Whitman and Asia is not a settled one. Whitman's democracy, his nationalism, his embracing of the American scene, his comradely love are subjects much discussed and, usually, clearly understood. But this is not the whole Whitman. Often it is in conflict with some other more mystical, more Oriental aspects of his thinking and writing.

The subject of Whitman and Asia is one needing a thorough and clarifying study. In an article published in *The English Journal* (January, 1937), Gay Wilson Allen touched upon this subject. "Tagore says that no other American has so accurately caught the spirit of oriental mysticism," Allen wrote (p. 49), but one can read Allen's monumental and significantly valuable *Solitary Singer* and find hardly any consideration of the import of Whitman's uses of Asia. I do not say this to point out any fault, but rather to indicate the need for a monograph on this important subject.

Whitman's formative ideas with his early writing of *Leaves of Grass* involve an inclusiveness, an acceptance, a concept of world spirituality and ultimate unity. This inclusiveness is frequently couched in national terms, with American limitation. The new American democracy is the pattern for cosmic democracy. What is Whitman to do, then, with feudal Japan?



with India and the caste system? What has he to do with untouchability?

Was Whitman, then, driven to think of Asia only in terms of changing it to conform to the new democracy? Does he think of the ancient lands as peoples to be liberated by the new freedom, as in "Years of the Modern"? Is there, essentially, a paradoxical conflict involved in Whitman's nationalism, in his view of America bringing freedom to peoples of other lands, and in his "vast rondure" sweep in "Passage to India"?

# *Robinson's Dark-Hill-to-Climb Image*

*We've each a darkening hill to climb*

—“Flammonde”

EDWIN Arlington Robinson (1869-1935) is firmly established in critical judgment as among the three or four most significant American poets since Walt Whitman. He began writing poetry at about the time of the death of Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman and while his equally prominent contemporary Robert Frost was also beginning to think of poetry as a career. Both Robinson and Frost grew to manhood in the rigors of upper New England, attempting to give themselves to the exacting art of poetry in an environment and age which offered them little encouragement.

Although Frost, born in 1874, was five years the younger, they both began to be read by more than a handful of friends at about the same time, following 1914; but neither received sufficient public or solid critical acclaim to become established until into the 1920's, when Robinson was past his fiftieth year. Robinson was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in America as writer of the outstanding volume of poetry for the year in 1921; he received the award also in 1924, and again for the third time in 1927. Frost won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1923, 1930, 1936, and 1942. It was as late as 1927, when Robinson was fifty-eight years old, before he had enough income from his poetry to pay his personal debts and free himself from dependency upon the bounty of friends. Frost had not been entirely dependent upon

writing for his livelihood, but had been school teacher, farmer, and special lecturer in various colleges, as well as lecturer and reader of poems to the public for fees. Robinson stands as the supreme example of the American poet who faced stalwartly and directly the long climb of the literary career, confronting the vast unconcern of the public and the silence of critics and commentators on literature while remaining solidly devoted to his art.

Moreover Robinson's personal life brought him near the dark ways which may lie before even those who seem to have successful lives. He was a youngest son, child of his parents' later middle years. His two older brothers had become well established as doctor and banker while he was a school boy, but before he left his teens behind him both of these handsome, socially poised, and outwardly successful brothers had tumbled to ruin, one given to dope, the other to drink, and also the father's modest fortune was lost in financial collapse and the apparently successful family had come to dark days. The father died in darkness of spirit and the sensitive young poet was to live through his formative late teens and early twenties with the wrecks of his two brothers' lives casting long shadows over him. It is understandable that he often thought of Omar's "luckless Pots he marred in making" and contemplated the dark mystery at the heart of things.

He had two years of study as a special student at Harvard, but the weight of family disasters brought him back to the home community of Gardiner, Maine, the "Tilbury Town" of his poems. In an environment of wrecked hopes and blasted lives, without the literary friendship and associations which he needed, he wrote a prose study in darkness which he called, "The Black Path." But he was himself saved from slipping into the abyss by the realization that "if things are bound to go to the devil anyway, the best thing for me to do is to let them go."

He found himself a room where he could write, and he worked steadily and painstakingly over his little pile of growing poems, distilling them out of his early realization of the darkness and mystery of human experience and forming them out of the poetic talent which it would have been death for him to deny or hide.

He had only one or two readers for his poems in his home town of Gardiner and he needed to find some communion for his deeper stirrings. He secretly contracted to have the Riverside Press in Boston bring out in paper covers three hundred and twelve copies of his slender volume, called *The Torrent and the Night Before* for fifty-two dollars. It contained forty-four short poems. He intended to surprise his aged and ill mother by giving her the volume. But she died without seeing it a few days before the little blue volumes were delivered to him. Robinson was older when this volume appeared than John Keats had been when he died, but he had written to good purpose, out of his understanding and artistic discipline producing the best first volume of poems published by an American. It was his authentic voice, his poetry, and among the poems were several which have become general favorites; but that popular acceptance was yet a quarter of a century and more away. He still had to show that he could climb the dark hill alone.

This first volume, too, reveals that though the hill he climbed was a dark hill, it was not without its gleam of light. For those who have faced the darkness and doubt and mystery, looking steadily and courageously, a glimmer of light will come, but the real light may only come to those who

are strong enough

To plunge into the crater of the Scheme.<sup>1</sup>

Robinson was looking at his age with unblinking eyes and evaluating the usual patterns of popular success as against the darker depths which he saw in life—as he contrasted them for all time to come in “Richard Cory.” He wrote a long and searching letter to his friend and confidant Harry Smith. The ways of the world and the outward success were one thing, but not for him.

These things are temporal necessities, but they are damned uninteresting to one who can get a glimpse of the real light through the clouds of time. It is that glimpse which makes me wish to live and see it out.<sup>2</sup>

He ends his letter with the philosophical long look,

It is a damned queer time for those of us who are here now; but it

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1. From “Two Sonnets,” *Collected Poems*, Macmillan, New York, 1954, p. 89. Quotations from Robinson’s poems are from this edition.

2. Emory Neff, *Edwin Arlington Robinson*, N.Y., 1948, p. 80.

is all right and we are going to hear it as it is—when the mortal wax gets out of our ears.<sup>3</sup>

When a reviewer of his book accused Robinson of pessimism, he wrote for the March, 1897, issue of *The Bookman*, the revealing and cryptic statement, which is in a way a footnote to Robinson's many studies of the warped and tangled lives of struggling men and women:

The world is not a "prison house" but a kind of spiritual kindergarten, where millions of bewildered infants are trying to spell God with the wrong blocks.<sup>4</sup>

Eight years later he could write of his own inner strength to face the long hill:

I know that I can keep on waiting for some time longer in the dark .... The present day disregard for everything save dynamics and dollars does not worry me in the least. If I happen to be ground to pieces in the hopper, I still have faith in the pieces.<sup>5</sup>

In his early poems Robinson had often caught the paradox of disordered and shattered lives beneath the masks of the everyday world, as in "Richard Cory." He had tried a short poem in the Greek vein on a Greek theme in "The Chorus of Old Men in 'Aegeus'" and had found the force to speak of man suffering in the whirl of years:

Ye gods that have a home beyond the world,  
Ye that have eyes for all man's agony,  
Ye that have seen this woe that we have seen,—  
Look with a just regard,  
And with an even grace,  
Here on the shattered corpse of a shattered king,  
Here on a suffering world where men grow old  
And wander like sad shadows till, at last,  
Out of the flare of life,  
Out of the whirl of years,  
Into the mist they go,  
Into the mist of death.

His long poem "Captain Craig" was published in 1902, having been previously rejected half a dozen times, thus bringing the young author close to dark doubts and gloom and even

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3. Emory Neff, *Edwin Arlington Robinson*, N.Y., 1948, p. 82.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., p. 135.

drink. The Captain of the poem, whose title is ironic, is a failure who goes

patch-clad through the streets,  
Weak, dizzy, chilled, and half starved.. ...

But the study of the ancient Captain Craig gives Robinson a chance to vindicate the principle that one should follow the compulsion of his nature even in the face of social pressure for conformity—a problem which had been for years personal to him—, even to the edge of hunger and destitution. The Captain has a self-awareness of value and he speaks to the few young men of Tilbury Town who hold aloof from the glow of popular approval.

Craig's struggle for the hopeful flavor of life's wit does not blink at the evil and social disorder but triumphs over it.

The motivating imagery of the poem is struggling or climbing upward toward light and truth. The image appears in a variety of contexts. It is not always introduced with full poetic realization. Sometimes it has the near platitudinous sound of a moral cliché; but the imagery is sustained and goes far toward achieving fulfilment in the study of the old man who has been cast aside by life's measure of success.

Craig belongs to the Romantic tradition of self-realization, touched by the Emersonian doctrine of self-reliance:

"I cannot think of anything to-day  
That I would rather do than be myself,  
Primevally alive, and have the sun  
Shine into me;....."

Even so he recalls the evil that he knows,—

".....men on stretchers or on beds,  
Or on foul floors, things without shapes or names,  
Made human with paralysis and rags,....."

In the face of his realistic recollection of such misery as besets the large number of persons he voices his alternatives:

"Because one half of humankind  
Lives here in hell, shall not the other half  
Do any more than just for conscience' sake  
Be miserable? Is this the way for us  
To lead these creatures up to find the light,...  
Or to be drawn down surely to the dark  
Again? Which is it?"

Craig holds that

"We may read  
The sun but through the shadows;....."

We are presented the contrast of a man's picture of a blindly optimistic woman and of the same woman's picture of the man with the dark vision. Captain Craig receives the confidences of both in turn. The man says that the woman has all that one might ask of this world

"Except an inward eye for the dim fact  
Of what this dark world is."

But her view of him is the obverse:

"Now there goes a man,"  
She said, "who feeds his very soul on poison:  
No matter what he does, or where he looks,  
He finds unhappiness; or, if he fails  
To find it, he creates it, and then hugs it."

Captain Craig's answer—and possibly Robinson's—to these two diverse views of life is to ask the question

Is it better to be blinded by the lights,  
Or by the shadows?

and to answer the question in turn by a brief review of his life. It is better not to be blinded, but to struggle upward toward the light of truth. The passage contains a marvellous figure compressed into the larger image of the upward climb toward a light which is given because it is earned.

Though I look back through barren years enough  
To make me seem—as I transmute myself  
In downward retrospect from what I am...  
As unproductive and as unconvinced  
Of living bread and the soul's eternal draught  
As a frog on a Passover-cake in a streamless desert,...  
Still do I trust the light that I have earned,  
And having earned, received.

This is the vision Captain Craig has of man's destiny, climbing toward the light. There are still the failures of the flesh to disconcert one, but even so the spirit is to be followed:

for the spirit knows no quail,  
No failure, no down-falling; so climb high,  
And having set your steps regard not much

The downward laughter clinging at your feet,  
 Nor overmuch the warning; only know,  
 As well as you know dawn from lantern-light,  
 That far above you, for you, and within you,  
 There burns and shines and lives, unwavering  
 And always yours, the truth

Craig learns that one does not climb alone, even though the impulse of his climbing must be his own. When the wisdom of the warm thought awoke within him, he could turn his

long-defeated face full to the world,  
 And through the clouded warfare of it all  
 Discern the light. Through the dusk that  
 hindered it,  
 I found the truth, and for the first whole time  
 Knew then that we were climbing

Thus early in his poetic career Robinson was himself struggling and climbing toward the image of life which found such conclusive expression in "Flammonde" and "The Man Against the Sky."

He achieved mastery of this central image around which he built some of his most poignantly memorable poems twenty years after his first poems appeared. The volume *The Man Against the Sky*, published in 1916, begins with the poem "Flammonde" and ends with "The Man Against the Sky." Between these two most significant expressions of man's dark climb are such poems as "Bewick Finzer," "The Dark Horse" "Eros Turannos", and "Ben Jonson Entertains a Man from Stratford"—probably Robinson's greatest single volume of poems, except, of course, for the volumes of his *Collected Poems* published first in 1921, but in the final form in 1937, the second year after his death.

The volume *The Man Against the Sky* stands first—and rightly so—in the *Collected Poems*. "Flammonde" stands first in it: thus the reader who does not know Robinson but comes upon the *Collected Poems* for the first time and opens the volume at the first page is presented a brief compact character study in philosophical vein of "the Prince of Castaways" groping for his way up the dark hill.

Robinson writes with a moving sympathy of the failure of one who might seem to have the elements of success inherent in



his character. He himself must have looked in the mirror with a wry smile on his small mouth and a twinkle barely visible in the mystery of his dark eyes as he contemplated himself, forty-seven years old, still dependent upon the generosity of patient friends for a place to sleep and a plate at table, frayed at the cuffs but still stubbornly confident that he was writing some poems worth preserving.

Flammonde, the enigma, has a haunting quality about him which Robinson has given us in the language of ultimate expression:

"With news of nations in his talk ."  
 "As one by kings accredited ."  
 "And what he needed for his fee  
 To live, he borrowed graciously. ."  
 "His credit strengthened when he bowed..."

Flammonde gave the touch of his understanding to the people of Tilbury Town—the woman "On whom the fashion was to frown," the boy who had in him the rare seed of learning, citizens who bore grudges until Flammonde unobtrusively said that "what was wrong should be made right" until "they had each other in to dine." Yes, he had a touch for the wrong turns of others : but what of him?

What small satanic sort of kink  
 Was in his brain? What broken link  
 Withheld him from the destinies  
 That came so near to being his?

The idea of the contrast between what is seen by the passing public eye and what is the depth behind the mask was presented in "Richard Cory," one of the Robinson favorites, written among his early poems. The mask is part of the Robinson figure of the human enigma, and he uses it in "Flammonde":

How much it was of him we met  
 We cannot ever know...  
 Rarely at once will nature give  
 The power to be Flammonde and live.

After unfolding for us the appearance of Flammonde and the contradiction between the character and the community of Tilbury Town, Robinson does give us an application. It is not a moral placed on a post at the end of a poem. It is a part of

the vision of destiny which is his, not ornament added but the acknowledgement of the essential framework. Robinson has peopled Tilbury Town for us with many characters, each with his own quirk, each with his own core of destined image and search. Each belongs to mankind. Each in his own individual way speaks for the body of man. Flammonde, the castaway at fifty in a society which he could touch with healing but which some quirk or kink prevented him from entering, walks with us all, the mystery of life hinted but unrevealed.

We've each a darkening hill to climb,  
And this is why, from time to time  
In Tilbury Town, we look beyond  
Horizons for the man Flammonde.

In the six short stanzas of "Eros Turannos" Robinson gives us the dramatic force of two lives pulled together in tragic wedlock. The poem is one of the better examples of the Robinsonian twist toward darkness as he searches in the ways of God. The poem has an intensity of distilled emotion. The simple nobility of direct speech proves to have evocative power to bring us to feel the dark depth of life—for in this poem the figure is of a downward course. In three stanzas "she secures him" even though "his engaging mask" gave her reason to beware.

The third stanza ends with the words "she secures him." This is the mid-point of the poem and the break between one stanza and the next. The compression and concentrated movement of which Robinson is capable is not better illustrated than in the two following lines, the impact being implicit in the poetic image which follows the statement of marriage:

The falling leaf inaugurates  
The reign of her confusion:  
The pounding wave reverberates  
The dirge of her illusion.

After these lines we can enter into the experience of a home "where passion lived and died" and see Tilbury Town "vibrate with her seclusion." But the story of a house or a person can never be told, even though a poem may lead us to glimpse the mystery of experience, to feel the weight that is carried. Instead of the dark hill to climb, this unnamed "she" of "Eros Turan-

nos" descends to the dark waters:

. . . they  
That with a god have striven,  
Not hearing much of what we say,  
Take what the god has given.  
Though like waves breaking it may be,  
Or like a changed familiar tree,  
Or like a stairway to the sea  
Where down the blind are driven

The basic image of "The Man Against the Sky" is of man silhouetted against the ominous light of the sunset as the dimly perceived man climbs the dark hill toward the threatening light. This poem has a trumpet sound from the very beginning which thrills and threatens like the call of doom. Man is only vaguely seen in his desires and urgings and drives, driven or lured up the dark road, impelled by powers hardly grasped in directions never clearly outlined toward goals glimpsed only as gleams hid by mist.

The questioning and speculation sweep over the poet as he sees the man against the sunset sky, alone, dark, foreboding, inscrutable,

...one who moved and was alone up there  
To loom before the chaos and the glare  
As if he were the last god going home...

The poet has, as it were, a revelation, a vision of the nature of life, an insight into the deep well of life which he will open to few men. What has been formerly only intimation has now become realization. But this grasp of the nature and range of life is not small or clear or explicit: it is the darkly perceived vision of the bewildered infant trying to spell out the meaning of life while using the wrong alphabet.

This man who walks alone is the image of man's aloneness. The climbing of the dark hill with no goal or purpose or haven in sight is the image of man's own fundamental plight. He may be lighted along ways that save or lured away from all repose—for his origins and his destiny are mystery—but "he who climbed and vanished" had found "the bread that every man must eat alone."

Whatever the dark road he may have taken,  
This man who stood on high

And faced alone the sky, .  
His way was even as ours.

This poem achieves the heart of Robinson's questioning, in wonder akin to awe, the journey of man, and it is a poem of the age in which the turgid currents of scientific speculation and more traditional religious quests meet in swirls and eddys, but it is also a poem rising above the subjective darkness of the author and the speculation of the age to an expression of the ageless quest of man's spirit and realization of the tragic web of life. It is brother to the voice of the psalmist who wonders at the ways of God and of the Saxon minstrel who compared the life of man to the brief flight of the bird into the mead hall of song and fellowship, out of the darkness and back again into the dark and stormy night.

This questioning of the ways in which man's nature is beset by satanic kinks runs through the volume of Robinson's poems. It is not a despair of man. It is not a vision of a dreadful night. Robinson in the early poem "Captain Craig" quoted Sophocles:

"Of all the many marvelous things that are  
Nothing is there more marvelous than man,

and throughout his life of poetry writing he never is unaware of that concept.

Captain Craig was a failure. We see him in his ragged impotence:

And after time,  
When it had come sufficiently to pass  
That he was going patch-clad through the streets,  
Weak, dizzy, chilled, and half starved, he had laid  
Some nerveless fingers on a prudent sleeve,  
And told the sleeve, in furtive confidence,  
Just how it was: "My name is Captain Craig,"  
He said, "and I must eat."

But the remarkable insight of Robinson's is that even this ragged failure, Captain Craig, can understand his life, as we have seen, as a climbing upward toward the light.

In *The Man Who Died Twice* (1924) we look into the darkness of Fernando Nash, a musician whose fate it is never to achieve what is his promise. Fernando Nash had been in the Valley of the Shadow, where

each man there believes himself  
 In this peculiar darkness more alone  
 Than any other. However that may have been,  
 Fernando Nash's darkness we may grant  
 Was dark enough

The dark Fernando Nash has his vision of light, even as he exemplifies human experience in a world where agony is real and happiness but a wish. The strength of man's marvellous nature is in the assertion, after Nash is dead, that the poet believed him to be the giant he had conceived himself to be:

Crippled or cursed or crucified, the giant  
 Was always there, and always will be there

*Cavender's House* (1929) opens on the theme of darkness and the idea that "Hearts are dark places." The wife whom Cavender had killed speaks to him out of the past of the way "we so twist and maim" our lives that we torture them "almost out of recognition." Cavender, the tortured, also finds—"as if a door behind him in the dark" had opened slightly—that there is light.

Yet there was light;  
 There where his hope had come with him so far  
 To find an answer, there was light enough  
 To make him see that he was there again  
 Where men should find him, and the laws of men,  
 Along with older laws and purposes...  
 And he was not afraid

The end of *The Glory of the Nightingales* (1930), a long narrative poem involved in the satanic kinks and warped purposes of Agatha, Malory, and Nightingale, brings together the theme of light through darkness.

I cannot know,  
 For certain, that your way, dark as it was,  
 Was not the necessary way of life.  
 There was in yours at least a buried light  
 For time and man.

There is a catharsis in the dark struggle and, as at the end of *Hamlet*, there is a word of promise that the gleam of light may yet shine a little brighter:

There was nothing left for Malory but remembrance  
 Of the best that was behind him, and life struggling

In the darkness of a longer way before him ..  
 A darkness where his eyes were to be guided  
 By light that would be his, and Nightingale's

*Matthias at the Door* (1931) has near its center theme the image of a dark door and the paths of each character

together and each alone,  
 Climbing to find a sky

One of these characters can say

I see a little, but I'm still in the dark,

while all of them, with the poet can feel the littleness of man in the finiteness of his life facing the infinities:

I was not thinking of how cold I was,  
 But rather of you and Natalie, Matthias,  
 And of what we had made of our three lives—  
 Or life had made of us. It seemed a waste  
 Of more than should be lost until I thought  
 Of nature's way and of how small we are  
 In our performances, and of how infinite  
 In our futilities and our ignorances.

Matthias finds that

We are prisoners now and pupils in a school

and he must himself somehow be born to the light, turning from the darkness. The last lines of the long poem give us the theme ending with the word *dawn*, as Dante ended each part of his *Comedy* with the word *stars*.

The night was cold  
 And in the darkness was a feel of death,  
 But in Matthias was a warmth of life,  
 Or birth, defending and sustaining him  
 With patience, and with an expectancy  
 That he had said would never in life again  
 Be his to know. There were long hours to wait.  
 And dark hours; and he met their length and  
     darkness  
 With a vast gratitude that humbled him  
 And warmed him while he waited for the dawn.

Robinson, who had so much of the agnostic in him that he troubled easy believers, used Biblical themes and incidents in his handling of the dark-light imagery. The poem "Nicodemus" (1932) has the advocate say, concerning Jesus and his followers,

They have come out of darkness—where we are,  
I fear, and where I fear we may remain.

and go on to say to Caiaphas,

He tells me of light coming for the world,  
And of men loving darkness more than light.  
He is the light, and we, who love the dark  
Because our fathers were at home in it,  
Would hound him off alone into the hills  
And laugh to see that we were rid of him.

The vision of man's dark doom, as we see, in Robinson is permeated with a contrasting glimpse of light. As he says so well in the poem "Annandale Again,"

My darkness had a smothered sun  
Behind it, trying to shine through.

The ending of his long Arthurian narrative *Lancelot* (1920) is, like that of *Matthias at the Door*, a featuring of *Light*—this time, capitalized.

He rode on into the dark under the stars,  
And there were no more faces. There was nothing  
But always in the darkness he rode on,  
Alone; and in the darkness came the Light.

Even Robinson's warped men and women who have within them some satanic kink are impelled or driven or lured toward the light, as

the man  
Who stumbles upward for the light

in "Sainte-Nitouche" (1902). This verb seems to be used purposefully by Robinson as a part of his vision of life. It appears in the poem "The Valley of the Shadow" in a similar way; "... there were many who had stumbled up to manhood..." Such a conception of man's lot needs to be considered as a corrective to prevent any simple exaggeration of the use of *light* imagery—which is pervasive in his poems. When a glossary of Robinson's poems is prepared, a large volume of it will be references to his use of *dark* and a lesser volume to variations on the image of light. Man climbs, whether literally or figuratively, from the darkness below toward the light above. Several pages of "Captain Craig" are interwoven with the image of climbing toward truth-light, variously pictured. But one of

Robinson's striking flashes of poetic imagery is achieved in the picture of old Eben Flood—in "Mr Flood's Party" (1921)—walking the solitary road above the city, alone with his jug of drink and his thoughts and memories, another one of Robinson's gallery of magnificent failures. Flood has learned that "most things break." Possibly it is this light of understanding which raises him above the town

Where friends of other days had honored him.

Eben Flood shines and rises in darkness and failure. There is something awful in light as well as in darkness. Flammonde pays a kind of price for what he is as he climbs his darkening hill. Robinson's "Credo" ends with the word *Light* but it begins

I cannot find my way . there is no star  
In all the shrouded heavens anywhere

and it rises to the point of picturing

The black and awful chaos of the night.

Man's hopes may lead to chaos and what in his finite brevity he dreams, may end in darkness; but Robinson never ends in negation or dark pessimism.

One must read him with an awareness of penetration into the dark mysterious ways of life, but he is not without the gleam or the promise of the dawn. Sometimes his lines strike one as almost a sermon on the blackness of darkness, as Melville says in *Moby-Dick*. The enigma of "Luke Havergal" has haunted many readers.

No, there is not a dawn in eastern skies  
To rift the fiery night that's in your eyes;  
But there, where western glooms are gathering,  
The dark will end the dark, if anything.

But even if mankind is like bewildered infants trying to spell *God* with the wrong blocks, Robinson has admiration for and insight into those who are trying to spell the word God. The gulf between the finite and the infinite is not easily stepped across. The point is that man must ask what, under the circumstances, is he to do,

Shall we because Eternity records  
Too vast an answer for the time-born words  
We spell...



hear no more  
The Word itself, the living word  
That none alive has ever heard

Robinson's gallery of studies in human destiny is one of the most challenging and magnificent which any modern writer has given to the reading world. In his own quiet way he climbed his own darkening hill, but fortunately on the way he conversed with us of the men and women of Tilbury Town—men and women of every Town: and he gave excellent poetic expression to the depth of character which he encountered on his mountain journey.

## *E. E. Cummings*

**A** MERICAN poetry during the past forty-five years has made a strong bid for prominence in the literary world. Since the first stirrings of a new poetic springtime about 1912 several scores of poets in America have contributed poems or volumes of poems or techniques or poetic attitudes worthy of serious consideration. The period has not been marked by the rise of one or two poetic giants worthy of attention beside Homer or Dante or Shakespeare. Rather the characteristics of this American wave of poetic production have been diversity, multiplicity, compactness and concreteness, and freedom of form and subject matter. Also it might be said that among the poets—especially those maturing poetically during the nineteen-twenties or after—has been a persistently strident voice of attack. This attack has been sometimes the arty Dadaism or a Greenwich Village protest against the once settled values which the Victorians found useful. The protest has been against cultural materialism, social formalism, moral conservatism, aesthetic regularity and circumscription, and any hobbling curtailment of individualism.

Since early in the 1920's Edward Estlin Cummings has figured in this American poetic movement with a flair for attracting attention and a boldness in flaunting the literary and social values of the general population,—and also with a genuine contribution of poetic value. His work makes an initial impact by the appearance of the page and seldom does a casual or attentive reading lessen the sense of novelty or the feeling that

the flavour is unusual—even though the substance proves to have a familiarity. It may be that Cummings turns out to be an anti-romantic romantic, an anti-patriotic patriot, an iconoclastic lover of idols, a realist who discovers something of the transcendentalist quality of nature, and a satirist who loves those qualities he abuses. But, above all, in a dozen volumes published over a period of thirty-five years he has striven to embody the nature of poetic experience and the experience which is captured in the work of art—the poem. He has felt and imagined his work. It has burst forth from his grasp of life. If the nature of some of his poems leaves many readers unmoved or else vigorously antagonistic, still the force and weight of his poetic effort and poetic achievement have been toward experience and away from mere craftsmanship. He has dealt with the poet as one who pours forth, not as one who constructs. There is, as he would say, the difference between the living and the unalive. In fact, the prevalence of *un-ness*, as he would say, is the basis of his attack; while his positive search for values highlights the essence of individual—thus unique—experience.

Cummings was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1894, his father being at that time a teacher, in the English department of Harvard University. The father served as pastor of Old South Church in Boston from 1905 to 1926. Cummings attended Harvard, taking a B.A. in 1915 and an M.A. in 1916. He was in France with the Norton Harjes Ambulance Corps before the United States entered the World War. He was detained in a French concentration camp for three months—an experience which led to one of America's most interesting and vividly personal books on the war, *The Enormous Room*, 1922. Cummings studied painting in Paris and he has continued to paint over the years.

He has recently been a special lecturer at Harvard, his lectures—which he calls non-lectures—being published in part in the *Atlantic Monthly* and in book form by Harvard Press. His paintings have been exhibited in the New York art museums and in one-man shows. An imposing volume of his selected poems (comprising the bulk of his previous ten volumes) has been published, *Poems*, 1923—1954, by Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York, 1954. Thus he would seem to have a

substantial place in any discussion of the fine arts in modern America. He is one of the dozen American poets of the twentieth century now firmly established. Whether in the long range of literature his work vanishes down the stream of time or not, he is at least vividly and emphatically present in contemporary American literature. He is lyricist, satirist, and experimenter extraordinary. No discussion of his poems can take the place of reading—and rereading—them. This paper will raise some questions and attempt some characterizations of the quality of his poems.

That individual quality or essence of Cummings' poems may be approached through a consideration of modern, especially modern French, painting. Picasso exercises a freedom with anatomy in his painting. He may paint a face with two eyes on one side of the nose, one eye high, one eye low. The nostrils may be strikingly open and large. Arrangement is not achieved by holding the mirror up to nature. Painters use disharmony, discontinuity, splashes of color. But somehow they bring the viewer into the presence of experience.

Some readers may think Cummings is merely jesting when he expresses his views in a jesting manner; but a consideration of his 468 page volume of poems should indicate that he would not be continuing a jest for that many pages written over a period of thirty-five years. In the Foreword to his volume *Is 5* (1926) he wrote:—

At least my theory of technique, if I have one, is very far from original; nor is it complicated. I can express it in fifteen words, by quoting The Eternal Question And Immortal Answer of burlesk, viz., "Would you hit a woman with a child?—No, I'd hit her with a brick." Like the burlesk comedian, I am abnormally fond of that precision which creates movement.

This poet creates movement. He brings the reader into experience. Here is a passage from his first volume of poems:

And still the mad magnificent herald Spring  
assembles beauty from forgetfulness  
with the wild trump of April: witchery  
of sound and odour drives the wingless thing  
man forth into bright air, for now the red  
leaps in the maple's cheek, and suddenly

by shining hordes in sweet unserious dress  
ascends the golden crocus from the dead<sup>1</sup>

This beautiful passage has linguistic usages which Wordsworth would not have accepted, like "sweet unserious dress," but it does bring creative movement into experience. It has a melodic structure of harmony, making use of alliteration, assonance, and faint echoes of repeated sound, even while shunning direct rhyme. Within these few lines we come to the hordes of golden crocus with a fresh vitality that Wordsworth's host of golden daffodils does not achieve for us. The wingless thing man takes his place in nature's experience.

But this quotation is too conventional in appearance and in phrasing to be representative of Cummings. These lines from another early poem, "Chansons Innocentes," p. 21, may serve more as an introduction to his work.

in Just—  
spring when the world is mud-  
luscious the little  
lame balloonman  
whistles far and wee  
and eddieandbill come  
running from marbles and  
piracies and it's  
spring  
when the world is puddle-wonderful

The appearance on the page of this poem is unusual and possibly unjustifiable. The only capital letter is strangely placed, punctuation is missing except for two hyphens and a dash. Words are run together, are separated by space. Lines are spaced without regard to stanza, paragraph, or sentence distinction. The word *wee* breaks in to what might have started for the reader as a frozen expression. The reader is jolted into sufficient alertness to experience, not just to say the words. Spring, when the world is mud-luscious, takes even the conventional adult to the edge of experiencing childhood, with the whistle of the balloonman bringing Eddie and Bill running from their play with marbles or at being pirates. Precision creates

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1. From "Edithalamian," *Poems*, 1923-1954, N.Y., p. 4. Page references hereafter are to this volume.

movement, or liveness, while the phrasing gives beauty and imaginative lift to the passionate and sensuous grasp of life.

Or consider another poem, "Portraits, VIII," pp. 148-9, which is a picture, a visual experience, without application or conclusion, even as we would see for a moment a sight in a cafe or on the street,

5  
 debbies-with men-in-them smoke Helmar  
 cigarettes 2  
 play backgamon, 3 watch

A little tableau is unfolded for us, a scene—an experience into which we can enter as we will, sucking up the vividness of sight and sound and absorbing movement and harmony of arrangement—the stuff of which life is made, the nuances which distinguish the creative observer. A few details are given us.

a has gold  
 teeth b pink  
 suspenders c  
 reads atalantis

One man buys "Bawstinamereekin"—an affected pronunciation of the newspaper *Boston American* as a newsboy might call it for sale in the streets; two of the men discuss the news in the streets; two of the men discuss the news in Turkish; another starts a phonograph playing an Armenian record:

pho  
 nographisrunn  
 ingd o w, n, phonograph  
 stops

One man swears in Persian; the game is over, the men separate, saying "Goo dnighfef fendi": the little scene of the five men is ended.

Different readers may read this poem with a variety of reactions, but if "reading a poem" means getting into the creative experience with imaginative recreation, then this poem can enrich as a new experience can the tapestry of life.

One night the young writer Stephen Crane spent an hour with the older and famous writer and critic William Dean Howells. Howells read to him the newly published poems of Emily Dickinson, fragile bits of embodied life delicately but

firmly woven. The young Crane went from that memorable experience to a waterfront tavern (they were in New York) where in a back room he watched Negro stevedores shooting craps (playing dice). Crane was not one to be romantically carried away by the attention paid to him by the then celebrated Howells. He was after the vivid and immediate experience, the stuff of sense impression, the gesture, the angle of meaning, the flash of an eye. This handling in literature of the objective materials of sense impression is one of the strong qualities of twentieth century American literature. Cummings has that seeing eye which permits him to bring at his call the color, the line, the detail, the implication which his sense of propriety and appropriate value calls for.

From such a simple tableau as the scene of the five men in derbies, Cummings can move to a sharply pointed comment on the formalized empty lives which too often become our stereotypes, as in the first sonnet of "Chimneys," (p. 58).

the Cambridge ladies who live in furnished souls  
are unbeautiful and have comfortable minds...  
they believe in Christ and Longfellow, both dead,  
are invariably interested in so many things—  
at the present writing one still finds  
delighted fingers knitting for the is it Poles?  
perhaps.

The pointed emphasis, the bite, of this is sharply memorable and the attack is direct and sure. This is no widespread and general attack such as some satirists, for instance, Sinclair Lewis, too often give themselves up to. The concentration and economy of words and images here give an architectural delight. Each line is compact, meaningful, and gets to its mark. This is using the ancient sonnet form in our century to superb advantage. If one complains that there is here no *abba*, etc., rhyme scheme, he might in part solace himself by finding some faint traces of near-rhyme, although not according to ancient Petrarchan or Shakespearean pattern. But we do have—to take the positive view as against the negative—a compression and vitality and freshness of imagery, a memorably beautiful use of phrasing and a poignantly direct and sure use of words. Perhaps—but I do not think it is necessary—one should experience the furnished flats of the American cities to read with full

impact the second half of the first line. But this image, excellent as it is, is added to by each half of the second line. The third line quoted above, which is line five in the sonnet, is a gem of compressed significance. The bringing together of Christ and Longfellow is a good union, combined with the verb *believe* the irony of the union is apparent and with the added observation *both dead* the satiric structure rises grandly. Filled with good works and ready furnished hand-me-down good sentiment these ladies knit—it is *that* they are doing *now*?—for the—who are the current recipients?—is it Poles? With this one might stop, having developed the pointedly satirical portrait to good effect. The *perhaps* added must be regarded as an example of the Cummings spirit of youthful and abundant fullness.

If we have seen the octave or the presentation of the sonnet, the sestet or the concluding comment is equally excellent and appropriate. As we would expect, the “permanent faces coyly bandy scandal”—there is a clause exemplifying the complexity of point and counterpoint which Cummings can achieve by vowel and consonant interplay—as

sometimes in its box of  
sky lavender and cornerless, the  
moon rattles like a fragment of angry candy

It is such magic achievement with language as this sonnet illustrates, even to the last line and the last two words, that makes the reader wonder why Cummings sometimes stumblingly puts in his poems such inanities as “abslatively posolutely” which occurs on the page following the finely conceived and executed Cambridge ladies. But if he fails sometimes, he also often succeeds, and the bulk of his poems of merit is considerable and the value of his approach to life through vivid and individual experience is pertinent to our time. With the world in danger of having “furnished souls” and “permanent faces” thrust upon millions of peoples, the wit and vision of Cummings may help us to hesitate in joining any such forward march to any planned and bureaucratically administered *Enormous Room*.

Thus Cummings prefers the individual experience to the cliché, the valid bit of life to the finery of borrowed expression. He exalts the individual—the living self—above the group, the



mass, the state. *Everyone* and *most people* are mass approaches which he dislikes. Like Samuel Butler in *Erewhon* he attacks the followers of Mrs. Grundy in whatever fashion or form. Probably one of the most significant aspects of this attack upon formalism has been his persistently held view—expressed in a variety of ways since the publication of *The Enormous Room* in 1922—that man can come only to disaster through establishing political control as *the* control. Whenever any dictatorial individual or class or nation sets itself up as the creative and guiding force for the whole—when it sets out to rival God as the creative and guiding force for the whole—when it sets out to rival God as the joint power of creation and punishment—then the individuals of the world are reduced to *unaliveness*, to the puppet form without the dignity and directness of passionate experience and there is no joy or life or vitality anywhere at all.

Poem eleven of "New Poems" (page 339) brings into six brief lines something of the modern antithesis and the paradoxical problems inherent in such a juxtaposition.

my speciality is living said  
a man (who could not earn his bread  
because he would not sell his head)  
squads right impatiently replied  
two billion public lice inside  
one pair of trousers (which had died)

Here we can look at some of the problems involved in Cummings as poet. One can approach this "poem" in a negative and antagonistic spirit and readily point out the lack of proper capitalization, punctuation, and such aids to easy and effective reading as have become standard over recent centuries. Or one might say that a pair of trousers does not die or that "public lice" is a meaningless combination of words.

However, here in six lines, in three dozen words, is presented the plight which faces mankind if the individuals forget for a moment what has been the humanistic and religious vision of man's dignity, man's ability, man's worth and man's destiny through the onward flow of civilization, especially in the Western World deriving from the Hebraic and Greek cultures.

There is danger when we put our school children to executing squads right—especially our girls in school. That regimen-

tation is ever waiting to engulf unwary man is one of the themes of Cummings' poems, often presented lightly and lightly.

(of Ever-Ever Land i speak  
sweet morons gather roun'  
who does not dare to stand or sit  
may take it lying down) (p. 335).

He presents in satirical and imaginative imagery this waste land of the world where the propulsion is toward saying "down with the human soul / and anything else uncanned." Ever-Ever Land is a place that is measured and safe and known, where only sameness is normal. The bite of his ironic vision is apparent in the line "and the hitler lies down with the cohn." One must only remember the vision of blessedness in Isaiah and then, knowing that the name Cohn is a standard reference to the Jews, see what Hitlerism was doing to the Jews of the world and other patterns of unsameness, to see the forceful depth which Cummings with one striking image compressed into a few words can achieve.

The American penchant for advertising slogans and frozen political phraseology, the shallow use of guidebook expressions by American tourists, the patriotic gush which is a thin scum on the body politic of many a country all come in for good-natured guffaws and sharper ironic digs. "What could be more beautiful than these heroic happy dead who rushed like lions to the roaring slaughter? They did not stop to think: they died instead." (p. 193) Thus he has the overblown patriot speak (though Cummings does not use the capitals or punctuation). In "my sweet old etcetera" (pp. 197-8) he reduces to mockery the empty sentiments and puts them against the validly alive experience of the soldier—or the man. "i sing of Olaf" (p. 244) is an enthusiastic and forcefully handled rhapsody on the common man who stands out against the herd spirit. The poem burns like white hot iron and is inflamed with the passionate realization of the well-springs of experience. The short tragic resistance of Olaf to the forces of sameness comes to a swift end when the herd spirit

threw the yellowsonof a bitch  
into a dungeon, where he died

Cummings turns often to nature and to love to achieve

poetic realization of "aliveness" as against the unaliveness which has such strong forces of standardization and regimentation behind it. The *Oxford Anthology of American Literature*, N.Y., 1938, p. 1627, calls Cummings' erotic poetry "the finest written by an American," while many critics have commented on the beauty and depth of his poetic vision of nature.

love's function is to fabricate unknownness  
how lucky lovers are  
    who dream, create and kill  
while the whole moves, and every part stands still (p. 321)

Love as a force is ever new and the experience of love is ever new. In the Introduction to *New Poems* (p. 332) Cummings wrote,

Miracles are to come. With you I leave a remembrance of miracles: they are by somebody who can love and who shall be continually reborn, a human being, somebody who said to those near him, when his fingers would not hold a brush "tie it into my hand" —

Where the individual and experience come together with realization, there is aliveness—and there is the poem, when the poet has the creativeness to catch and hold the quality of the unique experience.

if somebody  
or you are beautiful or  
deep or generous what  
i say is  
whistle that  
sing that yell that spell  
that out big (bigger than cosmic  
rays war earthquakes famine....(p. 340)

Love and nature share in common the ability to bring awareness, to elevate the soul, as Edgar Allan Poe said. There are both rightness and pertinence to Cummings' poetic vision of life—of man in the world. The question might remain to be settled as to whether he is worthy as a poet. But in the short range view, as contrasted to the view we take of Homer and Dante, we may say that one who can write

the sweet small clumsy feet of April came  
into the ragged meadow of my soul (p. 219)

is not without poetic fire.

If one is looking for the standard forms of poetry and the

carbon paper phrase, he will never make friends with Cummings: for Cummings is the unrelenting enemy of the dead spirit of sameness. When one frees his vision from the pattern of categorical sameness and looks at the world of immediate experience he is reborn in some measure, whether great or small, as poet. In that spirit Cummings says,

I'd rather learn from one bird how to sing  
than teach ten thousand stars how not to dance (p. 345)

# *The Orient and American Literature*

**B**EFORE the various settlements of North America violently severed their colonial political status and established The United States of America, the school boy knew of Solomon and read the folk wisdom of the Bible lands gathered in proverb or fable. Reaching throughout the whole course of history the interacting influences have been continuously weaving the world's cultural patterns. The curiosity of man concerning the ways of far-off peoples has always led him into gossip or more accurate reporting.

Any beginning for the Oriental influence upon American literature goes back to Renaissance Europe. Before Captain John Smith sailed into the James River he had been in Turkey, and the Pilgrims who cleared their corn fields at Plymouth knew Abraham and the Queen of Sheba. The United States of America was an unfamiliar name even in the market places when *The Empress of China* passed Sandy Hook to carry the thirteen-starred flag around Cape Horn to Canton. In the decades to follow—as the stars on the flag increased to double the original thirteen—the sea ways and ports of the Orient became familiar with the stars and stripes flying above such names of ships as *Canton*, *Rajah*, *Grand Turk*, *Sumatra*, *China*, *Canton Packet*, *Levant*, *Celestial*, *Oriental*—or the more exotic *Witch of the Wave*, *Sea Witch*, *Sword-Fish*, *Typhoon*, *Flying Fish*, or *Sovereign of the Seas*.

In those years of great commercial expansion, the "Indies" meant all of the mysterious, incomprehensible East—spices, tea, silks, jade, and porcelain of delicate texture. The American ship *Franklin* sailed into Nagasaki in 1799—as did the *Margaret* in 1801—and saw the bowings and formulas of feudal Japan, leaving with cloves and chintz, black pepper, elephants' teeth, and sapan wood. The *George*, from 1814 to 1836, made twenty-one voyages between New England and the Orient. Her sailors were always young, native-born Americans, usually potential officer material. Of her crew members, forty-five became shipmasters and twenty more became chief mates. Seven thousand young Americans signed papers in the offices of Joseph Peabody and sailed into Calcutta, Canton, Sumatra, and the Orient.

The father of Nathaniel Hawthorne, the great narrator of profound tales, was one young New Englander who went out into Orient seas. He sailed at fourteen and was aboard the *America* which, out of Calcutta in 1795, brought the first elephant to an American port. This small female elephant (in itself a piece of the Orient) sold in New York for ten thousand dollars. Captain at twenty-one, the senior Nathaniel Hawthorne took the *Perseverance* to Batavia, to Manila, to Canton, and back to Salem. Ten years later he died of yellow fever in Surinam, leaving a widow with a three-year-old son and two daughters, five years old and three months old.

That son, Nathaniel Hawthorne, tried to sail into Oceania. When Congress authorized the Reynolds Expedition to explore in the South Seas and the Antarctic in 1837, Hawthorne had expectations for a time of going on the five year cruise as historian. He did not get the appointment, but he did watch the seaways from the vantage point of the customs house, first at Boston, later at Salem. In his first week at Derby's wharf in Salem in 1846 he saw come into port from the seaways of the world: *Retrieve*, *E. H. Herrick*, *Rattler*, *Romp*, *Juliet*, *Alabama*, *Cherokee*, *Mary Ann*, *Tarquin*, *Julia Ann*, *Richard*, *James*, *Charles*, *Hebe*, *Solomon Francis*, *Paragon*, *Mount Hope*, *Star*, *Zanie*, *Elivia*, *Lewis*, *Robert Pulsford*, *Rebecca*, *Laurel*, and the *Rainbow*—just in from Canton.

Herman Melville as a youth had sailed to Liverpool, that busiest of ports, and there had seen the ships of the world and the peoples of the East—Malays, Mahrattas, Burmese, Siamese, Cingalese. Later he sailed in the Indian Ocean and through Sunda Strait and past the Bashee Isles. Melville was the first of the great American writers to know the Orient at first hand. And who, knowing the chapter, "The Pacific," in *Moby-Dick*, can doubt the penetration of the East into Melville? Out past Bataan he saw the ocean roll eastward for a thousand leagues of blue—the sea with its sweet mystery

"whose gently awful stirrings seem to speak of some hidden soul beneath . . . And meet it is, that over these sea pastures, wide-rolling watery prairies and Potters' Fields of all four continents, the waves should rise and fall and ebb and flow unceasingly, for here, millions of mixed shades that we call lives and souls, lie dreaming, dreaming, still.

"To any meditative Magian rover, this severe Pacific rolls the midmost waters of the world, the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic being but its arms . . . . Thus this mysterious, divine Pacific zones the world's whole bulk about; makes all coasts one bay to it, seems the tide-beating heart of earth."

All of the foremost writers of the American renaissance were deeply touched by the Orient. Emerson began his bookish association with the wisdom of Asia during his college days. Though his acquaintance with the writings of the East did not develop into intimacy until after Melville had inhaled the strong breezes of Sumatra, Emerson was almost the high priest of Orientalism in America by the time he published "Brahma" in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1857.

Emerson saw

in the history of the intellect no more important fact than the Hindu theology, teaching that the beatitude or supreme good is to be attained through science: namely, by the perception of the real and the unreal, setting aside matter, and qualities and affections or emotions and persons, as miasmas or illusions, and thus arriving at the contemplation of the one eternal Life and Cause, and a perpetual approach and assimilation to Him.

Thoreau heard clearly the resoundings of the ancient sea, and he found that even the clear waters of Walden extended away to the Ganges. and he took his texts from Chinese and Hindu scriptures. Alcott felt, especially with *The Dial* publishing the

mystic wisdom which is ageless, that "the gates of the East are now opening wide and giving the free commerce of mind with mind...." Emerson found the insight of the East "nearer to my business and bosom than is the news in to-day's *Boston Journal*." Thoreau said, "In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the Bhagvat-Geeta."

Whitman—even old democratic Walt—took passage to India, and to more than India. In the proud music of the storm he found the oneness of the world. In a Persian rose garden the priest says to the young students, "Allah is all, all, all—is immanent in every life and object.. " In the "formless, free, religious dances" from the Orient, "without form or sermon, argument or word—but silent, strange, devout," he finds the spirit of the East. Here he catches the clue, finds the new rhythm, gets the hint of the bridge he needs. Bringing together the past and the future, in his own way Whitman envisions "the flowing literatures, tremendous epics, religions, castes, old occult Brahma interminably far back, the tender and junior Buddha" and the rest (inclusive, as always) of the mystery, wonder, and wisdom of the ancient East.

Early in the nineteenth century the missionary impulse took Americans into many parts of the Orient and formed an invaluable cultural link between the average American church-goer and the remoter nations. The work of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, founded in Massachusetts in 1810, has been monumental during its entire history. Men like Pliny Fisk, Henry Jessup, Cornelius Van Dyck, Simeon Calhoun, Daniel Bliss were well-known throughout the Near East, where they translated the Bible and other literature, founded colleges and hospitals and churches, and ministered in spiritual affairs. They were also well-known in America and poured through the churches into the stream of American understanding and thinking a constant flow of information.

The first American missionary in China, Elijah C. Bridgeman, published a magazine, *Chinese Repository*, from 1832 to 1851, intended to spread among non-Chinese (particularly Americans) "information concerning laws, customs, history, literature, and current events" of the Chinese Empire.



S. Wells Williams, a printer sent out to China by the American Board, wrote such able and widely-read books as *The Middle Kingdom* and *History of China*. Justus Doolittle, a successful missionary in Foochow, published *The Social Life of the Chinese*. W.A.P. Martin, also a great missionary, wrote *A Cycle of Cathay*. E. T. Williams began as a missionary, but turned to diplomacy and then became head of the Department of Oriental Languages and Literature at the University of California. Arthur Smith and James Bashford, able missionary statesmen, aided America in its handling of the Boxer incident, and in the use of the Boxer Indemnity to further inter-cultural education.

Protestant colleges in the Orient have many thousand graduates and over the entire period of the modern American missionary movement Oriental students have been brought to America to study, to speak, and to inform America of their own national cultural patterns—notable among them being Sun Yat Sen and Syngman Rhee. No evaluation of American-Oriental relations in any field can ignore the large contributions of the thousands of American missionaries—seven thousands of them being out in the field at one time. Both Melville and Mark Twain were sharply critical of some of the shortcomings of particular missionaries and of the links between missionary and commercial activities; but it is certain that over the past century and a quarter much of the vast good will and understanding between Orient and Occident has been developed through the ministry of Christian missionaries. Moreover, many such prominent Americans as Pearl Buck were born in the Far East of missionary parents.

While Japan and Korea were still largely insulated from the Occident, China and India were actively open to the exchange of languages, literature, ideas, commercial products, and peoples. Many a New Englander went out to the Orient for business reasons—as does William Sullivan in that sentimental best seller of the 1850's, *The Lamplighter*. Whittier, by mid-century, could casually bring into popular poems such figures as “a complex Chinese toy” and “the well-curb had a Chinese roof.” And Chinese laborers were coming to the United States by the thousands and tens of thousands. Particularly did they work

on the railroads and in the mines of the West—and work as domestics or operate hand laundries in the cities.

In *Roughing It* (1871), Mark Twain devotes a chapter to the Chinese in America. Every Western city—especially every mining center—had its Chinese population. “They are quiet, peaceable, tractable, free from drunkenness,” Twain wrote, “and they are as industrious as the day is long. A disorderly Chinaman is rare, and a lazy one does not exist. . . . White men often complain of want of work, but a Chinaman offers no such complaint; he always manages to find something to do.”

Twain said that common signs were “See Yup, Washer and Ironer,” “Hong Wo, Washer,” “Sam Sing and Ah Hop, Washing.” And, he said, “The house-servants, cooks, etc., in California and Nevada, were chiefly Chinamen. There were few white servants and no Chinawomen so employed. Chinamen make good house-servants, being quick, obedient, patient, quick to learn, and tirelessly industrious.”

But all popular writers did not see the Oriental in such favorable light. The 1870's and 1880's in America were times of rapid expansion, industrial development, and change. Social patterns were being dislocated. Cities were growing and changing. Labor unions were struggling for a foothold. Immigrants were coming from all the world into American ports. Many Americans were alarmed by the great influx of the non-American. Thomas Bailey Aldrich, in “Unguarded Gates,” expressed the strong disapproval felt by many:

“Wide open and unguarded stand our gates,  
And through them presses a wild motley throng—  
Men from the Volga and the Tartar steppes,  
Featureless figures from the Hoang-Ho,  
Malayan, Scythian, Teuton, Kelt, and Slav,  
Flying the Old World's poverty and scorn:  
These bringing with them unknown gods and rites,  
Those, tiger passions, here to stretch their claws.  
In street and alley what strange tongues are loud,  
Accents of menace alien to our air,  
Voices that once the tower of Babel knew!”

In a less serious mood of disapproval, but also doubtful of the place of the Chinese in American life, was Bret Harte's “Plain Language from Truthful James”:

“Which I wish to remark,  
And my language is plain,  
That for ways that are dark  
And for tricks that are vain,  
The heathen Chinese is peculiar ”

And coming along in the poem, which recounts Ah Sin's mis-dealing at cards, a game “he did not understand,” is the line, “We are ruined by Chinese cheap labor”... Of course, the appearance of a volume called *Chinatown Stories* was inevitable—as, also, was the passage of some kind of Chinese exclusion act.

Thoreau, with one of the penetrating questions which he knew how to write, asked, “What have death, and the cholera, and the immortal destiny of man, to do with the shipping interests?” The end of the nineteenth century produced a small group of able Americans who furthered an interest in the Orient on a far deeper and more fundamental plane than commerce or disease. Henry Adams, John La Farge, William Bigelow, Percival Lowell, Augustus Saint-Gaudens, Lafcadio Hearn—these men, partly as an escape from the failure of American materialism to make satisfactory aesthetic and spiritual adjustments, all turned in one way or another toward the Orient and brought into American life more deeply than ever before the heritage of Asia. These men expected to find certain intangible conditions of life in the Orient which they could bring to the Occident. Korea had just opened its doors to all peoples, to bring its cultural heritage into the world of nations. Those last two decades of the nineteenth century were notable ones in Oriental development and in the interchanging of ideas with the Western nations. Chinese poetry, Japanese and Chinese painting, Indian quietism, Confucian social ethics—all were becoming more important to American readers. Museums of Oriental art were established in the United States on both coasts, and American interest in the ancient lands of Asia went far deeper than tea, porcelain, or *Madame Butterfly*.

“Sometime about the year 1910,” wrote John Gould Fletcher, the American poet, “I first became aware of the fact that the Chinese people had known a great literary flowering, and had enjoyed great writers of their own.” Many readers were making that kind of discovery concerning India, Japan, and Korea, as well as China. Tagore won the Nobel Prize for literature and

visited America to speak. Eugene O'Neill wrote "Marco Millions," "Lazarus Laughed," and "The Great God Brown," with their strong flavors of Oriental thought.

Kipling's unfortunate phrase that the East and West would never meet is—as he knew—far from right. *The Wisdom of Confucius* is available to American readers in book stores across the land in an excellent, inexpensive edition edited by Lin Yutang—who, himself, has been a favorite popularizer of the Orient in America. *The World Bible*, with the great sacred writings of the religions of the world, is a best seller and is helping to form the common bottom of religion which Emerson worked toward.

Pearl Buck's work has helped to personalize the once mysterious East. It is her contention that the East is neither more nor less spiritual (or materialistic) than the West. Indians and Chinese, Koreans and Japanese, Malaysians and Siamese, love their food and their comforts as do Americans, or Englishmen, or Belgians.

"This," she wrote, "may be said of all men alike—they prefer to have food rather than to starve, to have shelter rather than to be homeless.... Given a choice between a comfortable life on earth and a possible heaven afterwards, people, East and West, will choose a good life on earth."

The East and the West have been working toward greater understanding for centuries—with serious, short-sighted errors. But in literature national boundaries can evaporate before the light of understanding. The spirit of the East, through the genius of its great thinkers, has been made available to the West, and has found interpreters and sympathetic readers through the course of America's literary history. At no time has that interacting influence been greater or of more importance than now.

# *The Brahmins Did Not Know India*

THE generation of intellectual leaders in New England from 1820 to 1850 were busily getting acquainted with Europe and its cultural heritage. Longfellow was one of the voices of this drift of cultural climate, and he expressed the ideal of aesthetic universality for the mid-nineteenth century Brahmins in a memorable passage from *Kavanagh*, 1849:

Nationality is a good thing to a certain extent, but universality is better. All that is best in the great poets of all countries is not what is national in them, but what is universal. Their roots are in their native soil; but their branches wave in the unpatriotic air that speaks the same language unto all men.....Let us throw all the windows open; let us admit the light and air on all sides.....We shall draw from the Germans, tenderness; from the Spaniards, passion; from the French, vivacity, to mingle more and more with our English solid sense. And this will give us universality, so much to be desired.

With this view of literature few today would wish to quarrel. The statement is better in its expression of the ideal than those persons on whom Holmes pinned the designation the New England Brahmins achieved in application. But even so this very statement of the ideal implies the walls which New England culture was not penetrating and emphasizes the cultural truncation of the Brahmins. German, Spanish, French, and English literatures were making their way into the stream of American comprehension and acceptance. To these national literatures Longfellow might well have added the Italian and the various tales and legends of Northwestern Europe generally.

But in the Brahmin literature and cultural stream there is little acceptance of the ancient literatures of the Orient. The Brahmin cultural world was still a segregated world, even though their ships sailed the seven seas. The epigram and poem, story, lore, wisdom, and legend of China, of India, of Persia and of Arabia had not caught the attention of the particular class of Americans who considered themselves the inheritors, protectors, and disseminators of culture. This is one of the more curious facets of American cultural development, for theoretically the caste mark of these New England Brahmins was the ability to recognize the peculiarly desirable quality of the old and to make that valuable antique a familiar part of the gracious and amiable living of the present.

Of course, the solid old families of New England were anything but unaware of the Oriental half of the globe. Their ships visited the Spice Islands and Cathay. Even barricaded Japan was penetrated by the enterprising Yankee traders. Thousands, even tens of thousands of young New Englanders had seen the thunderous sun rise over pagoda and temple. They had brought home the knick-knacks, the gewgaws, the puzzles as well as the silks and brocades, the lacquered jars and boxes, the rugs and the hangings which were displayed in shops and introduced into parlors.

Some of these objects of Oriental splendor used in Longfellow's Craigie House were shown to his guests and admired as the work of an anciently mysterious and far-away world. The East left its imprint on the counting houses, the wharves, the drawing room decorations, but somehow the intellectual and cultural impact of India and China and the East generally was negligible upon the generation of New Englanders who considered Boston the hub of the universe and Harvard College the fountain where wisdom was to be found.

In *The Atlantic Monthly* of January, 1860, Oliver Wendell Holmes used "The Brahmin Caste of New England" as the title of his first chapter in a novel (first *The Professor's Story*, later *Elsie Venner*) and gave that descriptive designation a foundation which still prevails in American literary and cultural history. Earlier, however, in *The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*—also published in the *Atlantic Monthly*—he had made clear

the distinction which in fact prevailed and which he found significant as the caste marks of the intellectual and cultural elite. The Brahmins of course knew the ancient Romans much better than they did the Greeks, and Holmes wrote "We are the Romans of the modern world—the great assimilating people." This truth is part of the puzzle. What kept those persons thrown directly into commercial contact with the Oriental cultures from seeing the cultural, literary, and artistic values inherent in those ancient civilizations? Americans did assimilate, but they were slow to pick up the culture of the Orient. The reason is at least partly in this particular Brahmin caste traditionalism.

Holmes outlines the caste marks of the New England Brahmins. He disavowed the American penchant for "self-made" men, preferring "the regular engine-turned article, shaped by the most approved pattern, and French polished by society and travel." This quality of person, he amplifies, can be developed by four or five generations of gentlemen and gentlewomen, brought up among family portraits, using books with Latinized appellations and Hogarth original plates, familiar with family silver, wedding, and funeral rings, claw-foot chairs, and black mahogany tables.

No, my friends, I go (always, other things being equal) for the man who inherits family traditions and the cumulative humanities of at least four or five generations.

In making his point, Holmes uses about as much of Oriental materials as he ever finds occasion to draw upon. He describes as a family portrait to be desired an old gentleman "warmed up with the best of old India Madeira." One absorbs the quality of old and beautiful things, he says, "as the precious drugs sweated through the bat's handle in the Arabian story." But his whole conception rests upon the figure borrowed from India :

A scholar is, almost always, the son of scholars or scholarly persons.

That is exactly what the...young man is. He comes of the Brahmin caste of New England.

In a letter written to his friend John O. Sargent, Holmes helps us further to clarify this class of persons on whom he places such cultural importance:

I wish I had become as familiar with some classic author as you are with Horace. There is nothing like one of those perennial old fellows

for good old gentlemanly reading; and for wit and wisdom, what is there to compare with the writings of Horace?.. I want something, always by me, calm, settled beyond cavilling criticism—a cool clear drought of Falernian that has been somewhere near two thousand years in the cellar.

This is the key to the cultural caste which Holmes associated with the hub of the universe and the thinking center of the planet. The wealth of the class—much of which was made in commercial ventures into the East—made possible a comfort and ease which developed a leisurely culture. This leisurely culture had its decorum: the heritage purified and purveyed in the best teacup society of the best drawing rooms, presided over by some of the hostesses who have left us their memoirs—considering themselves as hostesses and representatives of that caste “distinguished for wisdom, sanctity, and poetic power, . . . holding in their hands the ministry of holy things...”

Another New England writer, James Russell Lowell, is probably the best of the Brahmins to illustrate the caste marks and also to show how the narrow conception of hereditary culture kept him and his kind from seeing what was before them in the larger world. He had behind him the generations prescribed by Holmes and he was surrounded by those “fine” “old” articles—books, silver, furniture—which would give him the feel of cultural continuity. It was natural for him in his letter writing, even from his young manhood, to see the desirability of his becoming, as Holmes so aptly phrased it, a “regular engine-turned article, shaped by the most approved pattern, and French polished by society and travel.”

“I need a good screen of the past behind me,” Lowell wrote. He saw that “we carry the Past on our crupper, as immovably seated there as the black Cave of the Roman poet.” He was conscious of the continuity and pattern of his cultural environment and said, “For myself, I look upon belief as none the worse but rather the better for being hereditary, prizing as I do whatever helps to give continuity to the being and doing of man...”

The most approved pattern involved the externals: “There is as striking a want of external as of internal culture among our men. We ought to have produced the purest race of gentlemen in the world.” Lowell goes on to speak of the lack of dignity in bearing—“They all stoop in the shoulder, intellectually as well



as physically." He attributes the greater name to Plato because he "dressed better" than Socrates. It is easy to see Lowell as a member of an old New England family, reared under the shadow of the hereditary tradition of Boston and Harvard, and growing naturally into the aristocratic patterns of Elmwood. He even wrote with the appropriately light touch to Thomas Bailey Aldrich, who was for a time occupying the ancient Lowell family estate, "It will make a frightful conservative of you before you know it. . . . Don't get too used to it. I often wish I had not grown into it so."

If Lowell had not grown so completely into Elmwood and the Brahmin caste, he might have been able to see more clearly the shape of the world in the making, but that is one of those imponderable *if's*. The fact seems to be that he and his fellow Brahmins were not able to see the East, to realize the values of its great heritage, or to comprehend that they stood at the beginning of the age which would bring the segregated East and West into a growing realization that the world is one world. The signs were around them, but they could not read the signs of the changing times. Instead of using the power of their position in America as the intellectual, or at least cultural leaders to aid in understanding and assimilating the new, they were either very largely indifferent to what was happening or openly hostile.

It is a strange anomaly, and something for those who are interested in the humanities to explain, that these Brahmins who pursued a scholarly culture with unflagging persistence—telling one another that a cultural heritage and cultural acquaintance was the way to intellectual freedom, the way to achieve an open poise and an ease in the presence of mankind and the world—these very repositories of the accumulated culture of the Western World distilled into the peculiar Brahmin flavor of New England, were shut around by such an impenetrable wall that they succeeded in remaining parochial and segregated to the end of their lives. Of them all it may, in general, be said that scarcely an inkling of the important changing ideas of the time penetrated their studies. They were servants of "culture"—writ large, but patterned narrowly.

Lowell's forebears and family connections were seafarers to the Orient and travellers over Asia. His relative, John Lowell,

Jr., died at the age of 34 in Bombay, in 1836. A portrait of him, by Gleyre, shows him in a large turban against a background of Oriental architecture. He left a will establishing the Lowell Lectures. Edward Everett, representing the Brahmins in introducing the first of that great series of Lowell Lectures, referred to the area where John Lowell, Jr., drew his will and died as a "foreign and barbarous land."

But James Russell Lowell was familiar with people who knew the East in a different light. In 1838 he was rusticated from Harvard for tutoring at Concord for three months. He knew Emerson, visited in his home, talked about books at a time when Emerson's Oriental interest was rising. There in Concord he also saw Thoreau, whom he had known as a fellow Harvard student the year before. His attitude was as superior and as superficial that summer, however, as it was when he wrote his essay on Thoreau twenty-five years later. "I saw Thoreau last night," he wrote, "and it is exquisitely amusing to see how he imitates Emerson's tone and manner." This blind spot in Lowell which made him comment thus on the unusually brilliant young Thoreau is the same kind of ineptness which made him in the later essay refer to Thoreau's style as involving "the tangled roots and dead leaves of a second-hand Orientalism."

Lowell, as man or boy, could think of the Chinese as a barbarous people who chained a living prisoner to a dead body; as a topsy-turvy upside-down people who spoke a comic language. In 1849, the same year in which he published his *Fable for Critics*, he published "*An Oriental Apologue*"—256 lines of buffoonery aimed at the Orient with not a line in it rising above the level of comic-opera understanding.

Somewhere in India, upon a time, ..

There dwelt two saints ..

One was a dancing Dervise, a Mohammedan,

The other was a Hindoo, a gymnosophist;

One kept his whatd'yecallit and his Ramadan,

Laughing to scorn the sacred rites and laws of his

Transfluvial rival, who, in turn, called Ahmed an

Old top, and, as a clincher, shook across a fist

With nails six inches long, yet lifted not

His eyes from off his navel's mystic knot.

Lowell read these misguided holy men a little New England lecture as a part of his concoction:

. . . what have you produced?  
 A new straitwaistcoat for the human mind,  
 Are you not limbed, nerved, jointed, arteried, juiced  
 As other men? Yet, faithless to your kind . .  
 Work! You have no conception how 'twill sweeten  
 Your views of Life and Nature, God and Man .

He even managed to introduce India's hunger, combined with a suggestion of cannibalism:

Some stronger ones contrived, (by eating leather,  
 Their weaker friends, and one thing or another,)  
 The winter months of scarcity to weather.

Late in life Lowell reread *The Arabian Nights*, he says, "with as much pleasure as when I was a boy, perhaps with more. For it appears to me that it is the business of all imaginative literature to offer us a sanctuary from the world of the newspapers, in which we have to live, whether we will or no." Here is the principal use which Lowell made of the Orient and of Oriental literature during his long life as a writer—it was a passage way beyond the "actual" to the "possible." The secret of the unconsumable oil, the wonderful lamp of Aladdin, the figure of an Arab sheik in the hot desert, the Ganges rising mid the freezing snows, the multitudinous breasts of certain Hindu idols—these were coins admitting men to dreamland, to the utmost bound of the imagination.

Lowell, the lifelong friend of Emerson who thought himself fitted to sit in critical examination of both Emerson and Thoreau, was never able to penetrate the Orient. The horizons of his culture hardly extended far enough to include the more Oriental qualities of the Old Testament. He could borrow some color from the magic imagery of distance and imagination, but it seems never to have occurred to him that the East which produced the rich furnishings which he and his caste admired might also have something to say to man. In the maturity of his criticism, in dealing with Emerson, Lowell could write that if Emerson "were to make an almanac, his directions to farmers would be something like this: 'October: *Indian Summer*; now is the time to get in your early Vedas.'" Unfortunately he could not understand the subject of his joke. Neither he nor the Brahmin caste of New England knew India.

In American life from the 1840's onward there were increasing signs that the ancient Eastern peoples were to find a place in world culture. Little by little glimpses of the East were presented to Americans in a garb other than that of mysterious outlandishness. Of course the circus aspect was present to a degree throughout the whole of the nineteenth century. Chang and Eng were viewed by millions and gave us the very wording *Siamese twins*. In 1846 Emily Dickinson visited, with her family, the Chinese museum in Boston "where she saw two reformed opium-eaters, one of whom played and sang, while the other wrote her name in Chinese for twelve and a half cents." The first issue of *Putnam's* featured a dashing picture of Bayard Taylor in an Arab burnoose and a turban. George William Curtis, as well as Taylor, was finding his way to Egypt and various Arab lands and journalizing gracefully on surface impressions. Various American magazines were using articles of observations on the strange habits and customs of the peoples in the far away lands, and Americans were being given the possibilities of knowing that such countries had substantial cultural histories and literatures.

*The Dial*, published between July 1840 and April 1844 under the sponsorship of Ralph Waldo Emerson and his Transcendental friends, was a plunge into Orientalism for any reader. Every issue of it contained translations of Oriental literature, with frequent comment and reference. Probably the Orientalism had too much of a mystical cast for the readers of New England generally; but *The Dial* gave Thoreau and Emerson room and occasion to work at their own problems of comprehending Eastern thought. *The Dial* was a young man's journal. It was looking forward to the new day of understanding. The contributors at the beginning of the project were under forty years of age and had their developing years ahead of them. Thoreau's very Oriental and also very Yankee book, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, was published at the end of the 1840's, having grown through the decade naturally and easily as corn grows on a warm summer day; unhurried, unforced; its roothold deep in the nourishing heritage of mankind's insight; its pages filled with the richest tributes to the wisdom of India and China, Persia and European literatures.

The advance of the American Oriental Society, organized on September 27, 1842, in Boston by fifty-six persons of wide-ranging interests, was promoted by John Pickering, who became its first president. The objectives of the society were to cultivate a learning of Asiatic, African, and Polynesian languages; to publish memoirs, translations, vocabularies, and works related to those languages; and to collect a library. This practical and factual approach, as over against the more mystical quality of *The Dial*, gave the Brahmins whatever opportunities they were ready to avail themselves of to come to an understanding of the East.

While *The Dial* and the succeeding writings of Emerson and Thoreau were mainly turned toward the literature of ancient India, the practical events of the 1840's in America were more and more insistently centering on China as the focal spot of the Far East. The Anglo-Chinese War and the discussions over opium were in the public press. There was, it is apparent, a rising resentment in America against the Chinese tone of arrogance and the Confucian assumption of superiority in the very designation Celestial Empire. The eighty-eight Protestant missionaries who had gone from the United States to China by mid-century were overwhelmingly inclined to educate Americans to demand that China should bend its lordly back.

The American policy toward China was in the process of being formulated with Caleb Cushing in the 1840's negotiating the Wang Hsia treaty to open China to a limited inter-communication. Representative T. Butler King, a member of the Naval Affairs Committee, said in Congress in May, 1848, that only certainty and rapidity of intercourse were needed to bring China and the United States nearer together, "to give them a more perfect knowledge of each other, develop their resources, and build up a commerce more extensive than has probably ever hitherto existed between two nations."

The thoughts of many Americans (Thomas Hart Benton, United States Senator from Missouri was an example) were turned westward, following the course of Empire, seeing the highway to the Orient across the American continent. That was even before the glow of gold in California awakened the world to Eldorado and set hordes of population moving. The gold rush,

the Eastern political developments growing out of the Anglo-Chinese War, and the great Taiping Rebellion of the 1850's were all strands which bound China and the United States together for the remainder of the nineteenth century—but not necessarily always in harmonious yoke. With the gold rush began the flow of Chinese immigrants—the pigtailed China boys—to America, a flood of them which reached forty thousand in the last year before the Exclusion Act closed the gates in 1882. In all a third of a million of them had come to the West Coast. The gold rush brought the East to the American West Coast—the Japanese, “lithe and diminutive Malays, dark-skinned Hindoos enwrapped in oriental dreaminess, the well-formed Maoris and Kanakas, the stately Ottomans, and the ubiquitous Hebrews ever to be found in the wake of movements offering trade profits.”

There was much happening to attract the attention of people in the United States toward the trans-Pacific nations. The rebellion led by the fanatical pseudo-Christian demagogue Hung-Siu-Tshuen in the Taiping Rebellion attracted the support of the American missionaries and the displeasure of the governmental authorities. Hence it was a prominent subject for discussion in America. The missionaries were convinced it was a “Christian” uprising and marked the beginning of a new China.

But, in keeping with the long range American policy of encouraging stability in the government of China, Mr. Humphrey Marshall spoke for the government:

It is my opinion that the highest interests of the United States are involved in sustaining China—maintaining order here, and gradually engrafting on this worn-out stock the healthy principles which give life and health to governments, rather than to see China become the theater of widespread anarchy, and ultimately the prey of European ambition.

During 1853 and 1854 Commodore Matthew C. Perry and a part of the American fleet delivered to Japan a letter of greeting from President Millard Fillmore and the Secretary of State—the New England Brahmin, Edward Everett. The achievement of a treaty and the opening of Japan to the commerce of the world was an event of great importance. Perry's *Narrative of the*

*Expedition... to the China Seas and Japan* was published in 1856, giving an on-the-spot report of the breaking of the feudal walls of Japan. In 1860 the large party of the Japanese Embassy which paid a return visit to the United States was feted in several American cities, the tour being climaxed by the Broadway celebration which was the occasion for Whitman's "A Broadway Pageant."

With all of the exciting and important development in the world through these decades, it is a curious circumstance that none of the Brahmins came nearer to expressing an interest in the East than an occasional reference to the *Arabian Nights*. The first time Elizabeth Peabody—that vigorous woman from Salem—met Longfellow, she asked him, "Mr. Longfellow, can you tell me which is the best Chinese grammar?" It is not reported what Mr. Longfellow answered to this ambitiously wide-awake young woman. There is a kind of irony in the fact that James T. Fields, the publisher, was to report to Longfellow that "in China they use a fan which has become tremendously popular on account of 'The Psalm of Life' being printed on it in the language of the Celestial Empire."

Oliver Wendell Holmes, who so ably characterized the Brahmin caste of New England that the designation is built into our cultural history, was not unaware of the East—even though his interest was superficial. Some tea was given to him by a merchant friend who was in the China trade. Over a cup of this especially fine tea he exclaimed, "This is the flower of the souchong; it is the blossom, the poetry of tea." That was in 1860.

In that same year Whitman, in "A Broadway Pageant," saw how the old Asia was being renewed, the new liberty was going to the old lands, the venerable Asia, the all-mother. He understood that

...the orb is enclosed,  
The ring is circled, the journey is done,  
The box-lid is but perceptibly open'd, nevertheless the perfume  
pours copiously out of the whole box.

The Brahmin caste did not catch the odor of that Oriental perfume. The Brahmin caste did not know India, but around them the circles of understanding were steadily widening.

# *The Pig-Tailed China Boys Out West*

**I**N the mid-nineteenth century the Orient was still to Americans a distant and strange—an unknown—world. Its commerce had attractions, to be sure, and many thousands of New England seamen had seen at least the watery portions of the glamorous East. The Transcendentalists had been infected with a kind of Oriental fever and through *The Dial* had introduced a few readers to the strangeness and the spiritual unworldliness of Oriental literature. Even some of the merchants and Boston Brahmins decorated their homes with Oriental hangings and curios.

But in 1849 the people and customs of the Orient were indeed far away and so strange as to receive attention, if at all, as mere curiosities in the world of western civilization. Japan was still a closed country. Korea was so tightly sealed as to be barely a name. China only grudgingly had opened two or three ports to "foreign devils" a part of each year. India was a vague part of the "Indies," which included all of those spice islands and low-lying shores of the south and east Asian lands and waters. Over all were strange and unnatural customs.

But in that Gold Rush year the pig-tailed China boys were bringing the quaintness of their dress, manners, customs, foods across the Pacific with an impact of great importance to the entire United States and to the future of the world. There in the glow of that Gold Rush spotlight moved the Chinese. Their numbers increased so rapidly as to entail international com-



plications, but in the meantime they moved into and over the valleys and mountains, villages and cities of the West with their serenity and adamant calmness, their industry and their strange ways—bringing the greatest impact of a culturally heterogeneous population that the United States in its entire history of racial amalgamation has ever confronted. These Celestials became entangled in labor problems and they became the butt of social abuses. They entered into the literature of the West and they became a political issue. But through the decades they made their way, seeking their level in life as waters of a burst dam seek out a new level. They were, through their presence, bringing Western Americans face to face with the Orient. They became a part of the Western scene.

From the beginning of the migration many visitors to the Pacific Coast commented on these novel new-comers. One tourist, J. Goldsborough Bruff, noted in his journal for February 21, 1851, that a brig and a steamer were landing passengers, horses, mules, asses, and freight—"besides a full-blooded Chinaman, with a broad-brim conical hat, blue nankeen unmentionables—of the most ample proportions, a pig tail down to his heels, and a fine brown American frock." That Bruff was interested enough in this new arrival from the Celestial Empire to make inquiries is evidenced by his adding, "He is hired here, for a gardener."

Although by this time more than four thousand Chinese had landed in San Francisco or nearby harbors, Bruff's curiosity prompted him to single out these aliens for continued particular mention. In his sight-seeing around "this singular city, of mixture, bustle, gambling, and trading," he saw "the celebrated Miss Amoy, and several Bengalese—male and female, and 3 Chinamen, in full costume, with long *queue*, umbrellas, and paper fans."

Again, after a couple of months, he still would write, "I passed to-day, in one of the streets a Chinese female, in rich silk attire, with the celebrated diminutive feet. She was very pale, appeared to be in bad health; and hung on the arm of a swarthy son of the Celestial Empire, with his huge umbrella, fan, and long queue—perhaps her husband. This pair have just arrived."

Emigrants came to California from Australia, the Marquesas Islands, the Philippines, Malaya, India, Turkey, New Zealand, Tahiti, South America—but ever the blue garbed Chinese stood out, with their fans, umbrellas, basin-like hats, and long pig-tails. They were not only conspicuous among the unusual peoples of the islands and Eastern continents because of their braided tails; but also they were ubiquitous with their ever-increasing numbers. Soon they were known and commented upon throughout the West.

The first Chinaman reported resident in the United States came in 1820, and during the next twenty-eight years only eighty-eight came. One became a naturalized citizen of Massachusetts. But the picture in California changed rapidly with the influx of population following the gold discovery. One Chinaman was known to be in California in 1847 and at the end of 1848 seven were known, one of them a woman. The South American mining companies had for many years been importing bound labor from China, and some few of those laborers were variously reported to have escaped into California. But 1849 saw the tide of Chinese immigrants begin to run.

Chum Ming, a merchant in San Francisco, wrote to a friend, Cheong Yuen, a letter which brought results. Once the lines were set up, Chinese came by ship loads. Fifty came in January, and by year's end 789 Chinese men and two Chinese women were known to be in California. A year later the number was four thousand men and seven women. In one 48 hour period in 1852, the *Akbar*, *Viceroy*, *Gulnare*, *Cornwall*, and *Duke of Northumberland* unloaded two thousand Chinese in San Francisco. Moreover, the first eight months of that year saw 18,000 men and 14 women arrive in San Francisco from China.

It was then that the newspapers began to speak of the unprecedented foreign arrivals and, in stronger terms, referred to the rat eating of the Chinese, their nasty looking vegetables, their unendurable music, their gambling, and their prostitution. Governor Bigler referred to them as "coolies" and asked for Chinese exclusion and control by special legislation. A miners' resolution referred to them as "long-tailed, horned and cloven-footed inhabitants of the infernal regions," and El Dorado

County mobs met stages and turned back Chinese. At Weber Creek their property was burned by white mobs.

In 1855 thirty-two Chinese were homicide victims in California alone. This happens to be the same number of dead as were victims of the Boxer uprisings at the turn of the century in China, when the Chinese were aroused to action against foreign penetration. The year 1862 records eighty-eight murders of Chinese in California. Year by year there was a steady toll, but no indemnity was paid to relatives or to China until the violent outburst in Rock Springs, Wyoming, in United States territory, after the exclusion acts were passed.

However, despite violence and opposition, through three decades the tide of Chinese continued to flow, until in 1875, San Francisco had thirty thousand Chinese in a population of 191,000 and western America contained about 116,000, with Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, and Montana each having from two to four thousand Chinese residents. Still, the year 1882—the last year before exclusion—was the biggest immigration year, with 39,579 arriving.

These three decades saw the Chinese distributed and adapted to the situations of almost every settled locality of the West. Colonel E. C. Kemple, in a report of a journey in 1874 from San Francisco to Cape Flattery and eastward into Idaho, spoke particularly of finding them—he called them a “heathen army”—everywhere. There was “not a corner so remote” that John of the Flowery Kingdom was not there. Far in the wooded solitudes of the Upper Columbia, a region of Indians and half-breeds, he found a Chinese cook. “I visited the Neah Bay Indians at Cape Flattery, a place inaccessible by any regular... conveyance. But my Celestial friend was before me.”

At The Dalles, in the sixties, Chinese labor was used to man the first fire engine pump ever used on the Pacific Coast.<sup>1</sup>

*The Weekly Astorian*, June 17, 1876, reported that

A white haired descendant of Confucius, grand lecturer in the Masonic work of Celestials, opened a lodge for Chinese in Astoria Saturday night.

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1. I am indebted to Mr. Courtland Matthews' radio address, "Chineses in Oregon," KOAC, May 21, 1937, for this and the two following items.

The *East Oregonian* of Pendleton, August 9, 1879, reported:

We have learned that Weston has a street sprinkler. A Chinaman with two square coal-oil cans with holes in the bottoms, tramping back and forth through the whole day keeps the Main street nicely wet down.

Lincoln Steffens, in his *Autobiography*, wrote of his horse-back rides in the seventies along the Sacramento River to where "the Chinamen had their peanut farms and represented the Saracens to me."

Early in the fifties such pictures of individual pig-tailed Chinamen as Bruff noticed were lost in the mass picture. In *Harper's New Monthly*, an illustrated article on California life showed the familiar pig-tail and conical basin hat of John Chinaman in half the pictures—at a bar, on the streets, in the mines, on horseback John was soon a normal part of whatever Americans conceived to be the California or Western picture. Nearly every community had its Chinese laundry or at least some house boy, cook, gardener—or group of miners, railroad workmen, or fishermen.

The first California reaction to the picturesque Celestial, with his hair down his back, his loose-flowing clothing, shirt tail out and elegantly long, was entirely favorable and hospitable.

In 1849 the few hundred Chinese at San Francisco retained an American, Selim Woodworth, son of the author of "The Old Oaken Bucket," to represent their interests for them. They were honored at a public assembly and presented with Christian pamphlets in their own language. They had a colorful part in the celebration of the admission of California as a state. They were asked by the mayor to take part in a memorial procession on the death of President Zachary Taylor, and they expressed in direct form their pleasure at such favorable attention:

Sir: The "China Boys" wish to thank you for the kind mark of attention you bestowed upon them in extending to them an invitation to join with the citizens of San Francisco in doing honor to the memory of the late president....The China Boys feel proud of the distinction you have shown them, and will always endeavor to merit your good opinion and the good opinion of the citizens of their adopted country....

Ah-Sing

A-He

In behalf of the China Boys

The San Franciscans had at the very least an attitude of amused hospitality toward fantastically interesting guests. The China Boys in their best apparel took part in Independence Day celebrations and were undoubtedly pleased to read in the papers that "We shall be pleased to see large additions during the coming year to this class of our population"; "These celestials make excellent citizens and we are pleased to notice their daily arrival in large numbers"; and "... we regard with great pleasure the presence of great numbers of these people among us...." The *Daily Alta California*, May 12, 1852, commented, "The China boys will yet vote at the same polls, study at the same schools and bow at the same altar as our own countrymen."

Wherever there was a group of the China boys, there was a bronze Buddha secure in a small shrine, to which regular offerings of sweetmeats, rice, brandy, roast pig, and other delicacies were made. Wherever man wanders from home he likes to have his household god nearby, as Virgil knew when he wrote of the journey of Aeneas; and Americans and foreigners coming from the rest of the world to the unfolding West had a chance to see the inscrutable Oriental transplant his age old ceremonies. A Chinese temple soon stood on the banks of the Sacramento River. The Chinese workmen could be seen in their native dignity, without any tinge of hauteur. Silently and unobtrusively they brought with them their past and their gentle, yielding, unassertive character. In friendly fashion they shared their festival day sweets and delicacies with friendly Occidentals, especially the shy children who came to stare and wonder.

Bret Harte, drawing upon his recollections of the early fifties, has left us his details of how the already picturesque situation of the booming San Francisco was made more vividly colorful by the Chinese:

"John" was to be met everywhere. It was a common thing to see a long file of sampan coolies carrying their baskets slung between them, on poles, jostling a modern, well-dressed crowd in Montgomery Street, or to get a whiff of their burned punk in the side streets; while the road leading to their temporary burial-ground at Lone Mountain was littered with slips of colored paper scattered from their funerals. They brought an atmosphere of the Arabian Nights into the hard, modern civilization; their shops...were replicas of the bazaars of Canton and Peking....

They were always neatly dressed, even the commonest of coolies, and their festive dresses were marvels. As traders they were grave and patient, as servants they were sad and civil, and all were singularly infantine in their natural simplicity. The living representatives of the oldest civilization in the world, they seemed like children.

Robert Louis Stevenson had a fine eye for the picturesque and a vivid pen with which to portray it. His months in California gave him a sympathy for the Chinese to add to his natural affinity for the underdog. But whatever one might think of the economic or the social problems presented to western America by the large Chinese population, there was, undoubtedly, always present in the minds of the established residents as well as of the visitors that here were an alien people and a mysterious one. According to Stevenson,

You will behold costumes and faces and hear a tongue that are unfamiliar to the memory. The joss-stick burns, the opium pipe is smoked, the floors are strewn with slips of colored paper—prayers, you would say, that had somehow missed their destination—and a man guiding his upright pencil from right to left across the sheet, writes home the news of Monterey to the Celestial Empire.

Frank Marryatt, an Englishman, saw the sights of early gold rush California and was much taken with the bizarre aspects of the Chinese. He gave a lively account of the way the Chinese as miners often engaged in noisy quarrels. It impressed him as a piece of comic opera, the Chinese all shouting in shrill voices, their lean arms gesticulating in rapid movement, hooked fingers protruded to indicate numbers and dates. With all the sound and fury, they were, as Marryatt commented, wary of coming to blows, for a fight would bring the American law down on them. The vociferous tumult would gradually subside, and the Chinese would return to their mining.

Marryatt observed with less than approval that many of the miners had cut off their tails and given over shaving their heads, suffering their hair to grow in its natural manner.

A more villainous-looking object than such an Americanized Chinaman cannot be imagined. Their straight hair grows low down upon the forehead, taking away the look of calm benevolence which seems to beam from the broad expanse exposed by shaving, and bringing strongly out the cunning expression of their little pig-shaped eyes.

But regardless of the unusual or objectionable appearance

of the pig-tailed Chinamen, everyone who knew them agreed that they were patient and hard-working. Though they might quarrel with one another over their respective rights, they were docile, peace-loving, and respectful toward all other people. They held it prudent not to try to claim rich mines. Accustomed to small returns for their labor, they did not object to working the mines abandoned by Americans as worthless. They were not restless dabblers. If they started work as a servant they probably had a job for life—or until they were ready to return to China—if their employer were reasonably fair to work for. If they started working an old mining area, they would work it as long as any pay dirt appeared. When the Chinese left a diggings, it was indeed worthless.

They were frugal and steady—beyond the dreams of Poor Richard. Their clean habits and temperate lives were combined with a native dexterity. Whether as laundryman, shoemaker, cook, merchant, vegetable man, blacksmith, they learned their work and went at it with a persistent doggedness that amazed observers. Unaccustomed to considerations of hours of labor or holidays—except their New Year's—they were as a group singularly concerned with the work before them.

They were valuable residents, but they were yet alien. How alien they were is part of the mystery of the Occidental's view of the Oriental of a hundred years ago, when from out of the dim separateness of worlds apart they were beginning to know one another. Stevenson, as well as anyone has done in a short passage, summed up the paradox of the presence of these thousands of residents of the Celestial Empire in the midst of America's new civilization. Stevenson was a fellow alien with a coach load of Chinese coming westward across America on the newly opened railroad which the Chinese had helped to build. He considered the fact that to many Americans they were then a despised race, and he concluded:

For my own part, I could not look but with wonder and respect on the Chinese. Their forefathers watched the stars before mine had begun to keep pigs. Gunpowder and printing, which the other day we imitated, and a school of manners which we never had the delicacy so much as to desire to imitate, were theirs in a long-past antiquity. They walk the earth with us, but it seems they must be of different clay. They hear the clock strike the same hour, yet surely of a different

epoch. They travel by steam conveyance, yet with such a baggage of old Asiatic thoughts and superstitions as might check the locomotive in its course. Whatever is thought within the circle of the Great Wall; what the wry-eyed, spectacled schoolmaster teaches in the hamlets round Peking, religions so old that our language looks a halfling boy alongside, philosophy so wise that our best philosophers find things therein to wonder at, all this travelled along side of me for thousands of miles over plain and mountain. Heaven knows if we had one common thought or fancy all that way, or whether our eyes, which yet were formed upon the same design, beheld the same world out of the railway windows.

Other observers of the Chinese formed less favourable views of them than Stevenson did. The French Catholic priest, M. Huc, after journeying in China, as reported in *Harper's*, said that "dishonesty and lying seem to be the ruling traits of the Chinese character." The American magazines of the fifties were presenting to their readers the customs and practices of the exotically mysterious persons of the earth in articles of information and misinformation—some of which were not designed to encourage sympathetic understanding between the Chinese and the Americans with whom they came into immediate contact.

The Chinese, so the articles ran, were as a general rule infidels, indifferent of religion, in the American conception. This absence of religion was evidenced by their indifference toward the sick or dying. A Chinaman who arrived in the harbor in a condition of critical illness would be put to one side, stretched out on a pallet, and ignored. When he was dead—that was a different matter. His body would be cared for, the funeral would be enthusiastic, and his bones would eventually be shipped back to China, at the expense of the Chinese group. The Chinese indifference to suffering contributed to a rising hostility toward them, and Bret Harte reported—whether speaking out of reasonably accurate recollection or with a writer's heightened color—that the anti-heathen feeling "reached its climax one Sunday when a Chinaman was stoned to death by a crowd of children returning from Sunday-school." Mark Twain, noting the same event, wrote that "in broad daylight in San Francisco, some boys have stoned an inoffensive Chinaman to death, and... although a large crowd witnessed the shameful deed, no one interfered."

The Chinese conception of what was edible led to sharp



attacks in the newspapers and magazines—and on the streets. One writer for *Harper's* in high flown phrases damned the Chinese as showing "their want of perception of the beautiful, not more in their worship of detestable deities and the cruel mutilation of their women, than by eating, as their greatest delicacy, the nests of swallows and the flesh of disgusting fetid trepang." He continued the evidence against the entire population stemming from the Celestial Empire by insisting that the fattening and butchering of rats and mice is "as good evidence against his race as the cruelty that stains the pages of his history, and the dark ignorance that broods over his mind." The Chinese, he added as the climax, not only eat, either "raw or roasted," the "common rain worm," but "with their incredible power of overcoming all natural instincts...raise the larvae of blue-bottle flies in heaps of putrid fish near the sea-coast, and value the produce" as food.

Mark Twain, reporting in the *Enterprise* on a visit to the Chinese quarters of Virginia City, envisioned the opium-smoking, pig-tailed Chinaman as dreaming of a paradise where he "feasts on succulent rats and birds'-nests." He praised the hospitality of Mr. Ah Sing, but added, "He offered us a mess of birds'-nests; also, small, neat sausages, of which we could have swallowed several yards if we had chosen to try, but we suspected that each link contained the corpse of a mouse, and therefore refrained."

In Western America two decidedly dissimilar peoples met face to face. The Americans who might have gone West in first headlong flight to seek gold soon settled down to build a nation. The Chinese did not easily lose their distinctive racial qualities. They brought with them their wisdom and literature and art and social and cultural patterns as well as their appearance. At first the unusual quality of the appearance was an attraction. When at a public celebration the China Boys appeared "with pig tails nicely braided" carrying fans, and with their flowing blouses and pantaloons carefully laundered, they were generally regarded, to quote the governor, "as one of the most worthy classes of our newly adopted citizens."

But the truth of the matter was that they were not "newly adopted citizens." They were sons of old China. Incessant and indefatigable workers, their aim was to save a competency and

then return to China to raise a family and live at ease. Chinese tradition forbade the respectable woman to leave her home, even with her husband. Though a third of the Chinese in America were married, only one woman to twenty-six men migrated here. Even the glories of the Golden State or other Pacific slope garden spots, then, could not win them over to think of themselves as permanent residents. A Chinese couple in America was a rarity, and of course the larger family or clan was always in China. The Chinese made temporary adjustments instead of taking root. Even their burial ground on Lone Mountain was a temporary resting place. By 1860 it was estimated that the bones of ten thousand of their dead had been shipped home.

Mary Roberts Coolidge in her study of Chinese immigration tells us that 1768 Chinese left San Francisco Custom House in 1852 for China. After that the number of departures from that port exceeded that number each year for thirty years, rising to its highest with ten thousand departures in 1882, the year also of the largest number of entries. This circumstance of Chinese coming to America, working here, sending money home, and then in time returning again to China was a subject for much general discussion and considerable differences of opinion. Two of the Oregon newspapers which joined in the debate differed decidedly.

The *Weekly Astorian*, under the editorial guidance of D. C. Ireland, attacked the Chinese continuously and severely. The lead editorial for January 22, 1876, a full column long, headed "John Chinaman," was typical:

Taken as a body, the Chinese are a heavy drag on the prosperity of this coast, a constant drain on our material resources and an element in the social fabric that disjoins the idea of republican institutions; and their unchallenged presence here would be an insult to our common intelligence. They do not come here to make homes for themselves—living or dead....

Every Chinamen [*sic*] on this coast is a faucet inserted into the land draining a stream of gold, small or large, into the land of his birth. They are incapable of assimilation with us. Everyone . . . will leave us nothing better than the odor of decay to remember him by . . . Their habits of life constantly menace the public health wherever they congregate.

Behind the persistent denunciation by Mr. Ireland and the *Weekly Astorian* was a long history relating the Northwest to

China. Still in the eighteenth century, soon after the establishment of the United States as a nation, Americans were gathering furs on the North Pacific coast for Chinese trade. In 1821 in a report to Congress on the occupation of the Columbia River, the Hon. John Floyd advanced the idea that an outpost in the Northwest could be established with Chinese settlers:

It is believed that population could be easily acquired from China, by which the arts of peace would at once acquire strength and influence and make visible to the aborigines the manner in which their wants could be supplied.<sup>2</sup>

The brig *Amazon* entered Portland in 1851 direct from China, beginning the flow of trade and immigration across the Pacific to the Northwest.

Whether going south from Portland or north from California, Chinese were attracted to the mines of Josephine, Jackson, and Curry Counties, and to the area around Baker as well. The following curious bill of sale is on record:

Wolf Creek, August 20, 1859.

Know all men by these presents that I the undersigned have this day sold one mining claim 150 yards together with 8 sluices, 2 picks, 2 shovels, 2 hatchets, 1 root ax, and one cabin to one Chinaman by the name of Chick, for the sum of thirty dollars.

Ephraim Allen

Paid by cash \$4

The other \$26 to be paid in five days.<sup>3</sup>

The *Statesman* of Walla Walla, November 29, 1862, published a report of the journey of Captain John Mullan, U.S.A., through Southern Oregon to California. Captain Mullan reported, concerning the Rogue River valley and Jacksonville,

We observed, in squads, the ubiquitous Chinaman, moving from mining locality to mining locality, fleeing from the kicks of one to the cuffs of the other, with no fixed abiding place to be called his permanent home.

The county mining tax collections for Josephine and Jackson Counties indicate the presence of about 900 Chinese miners in 1861. The Jackass Creek section of Jackson County appeared

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2. This very interesting report is given in full in *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, VIII (1907), 51-75.

3. *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, XXIII (1922), 140.

to be largely mined by Chinese by 1864, with mining claims held by Lin and Co., Tan and Co., Wong and Co., Lo and Co., Hing Foo and Co.

In 1869 in Oregon City the employees of the woollen mills protested the employment of Chinese, although the number of Celestials involved was only about a dozen. According to the *Oregonian*, October 14, 1869, plans were afoot to have 7,000 Chinese at work on the western end of the Northern Pacific Railway. Construction did begin at Kalama in December, 1870, but no such number of Chinese as was mentioned was ever employed. By this time Chinese in some numbers were engaged in railway construction in both Eastern and Western Oregon and continued to work on the railroads throughout the rest of the century. Their presence was used in election campaigns in 1870. Oregon Senators Williams, Corbett and Mitchell in the 1870s were actively and bitterly anti-Chinese. During this decade the Chinese in Oregon rose in number from about three thousand to about ten thousand. Most of the Oregon canneries had Chinese crews by the end of the decade, and they were sometimes used as strikebreakers.

The cuffed and kicked and maligned Chinese found some supporters and comforters in the Beaver state. St. Helens Hall, in Portland, maintained an informal school for Chinese from 1871 to 1878, giving instruction in religion, English, and other subjects.

The *Oregonian*, under the editorship of Mr. Harvey Scott, took a much more moderate view than did the *Weekly Astorian*. Mr. Scott did oppose the Chinese in America because they were not readily assimilated and he did favor the exclusion act; however he understood the extensive need for labor and felt that the Chinese were making a good contribution to the economic development of the West, even though on other grounds he deplored their presence. The *Oregonian* said, July 7, 1869,

Every Chinaman leaves the products of his labor, a full equivalent for the wages paid him. He leaves more; he leaves the profits which his employer has made in the cheap labor he has furnished.

Lincoln Steffen's *Autobiography* gave a brief conversation which focused on the core of the problem as many other settlers viewed the Chinese. Ah Hook asked Lincoln, the horseback riding boy,

what he was coming out to the Chinaman's farm for and received the boy's answer that he came to see. But Lincoln also asked,

"What for you Ah Hook come allee way China looker see Sacramento?"

"Me no come looker see Sacramento," he replied. "Me come catchem dollar, go home China."

The Chinese "left." That was a stumbling block to their acceptance. Living or dead, they returned to their home land. The *Hattie C. Besse* left Portland on November 15, 1869, with a cargo of "old iron, broken glass, Yankee notions for Chinese use, bones of defunct Celestials and nearly 200 Chinese passengers."

They worked, they saved, they sent money home to families, and they went home in very large numbers. And every one who died here in this far away land wanted his bones returned to lie in the burial place of his ancestors and his family.

There seems to be a deep-seated American folkway which might be summed up briefly: If you make it here, spend it here. This view of economic exchange is applicable to village or valley, city or state, or to the nation as a whole. The regular flow of money from America to China was an offense to many. Such phrases as "sucking the very life-blood of this country" rolled easily from the lips of the tavern loafer and the candidate for public office.

Robert Louis Stevenson wrote that he heard "a vulgar fellow"—he undoubtedly meant Dennis Kearney, the demagogue in the Workingmen's Party—speaking to the idlers of San Francisco, calling for butchery in these rhetorical terms: "At the call of Abraham Lincoln ye rose in the name of freedom to set free the negroes; can ye not rise and liberate yourselves from a few dhirty Mongolians?"

The Chinese in California and Oregon and the West generally mined under severe handicaps. In fact, the mines very soon became both unhealthy and unprofitable for them. Beginning with the first tax on foreign miners in 1850, the legislatures, often hampered by the courts, waged a decade long battle against Chinese and such other foreign miners as Mexicans. Many tales are told of the process of collecting the monthly tax from John Chinaman. Some collectors would tie the pig tails of groups together until all the Chinese who could be rounded up in the

area were assessed the monthly fee. Some hoodlums preyed upon the Chinese by posing as collectors. Some collectors mined the Chinese for sums beyond the legally set tax. But still, it is estimated that by 1868 forty thousand Chinese in California were mining in abandoned claims or working in mines as laborers.

But beyond such official (and extra-official) endeavors to curtail Chinese mining was a strong undercurrent of popular opinion which might be expressed in the words of a letter written to the press.

If foreigners come, let them till the soil and make roads, or do any other work that may suit them, and they may become prosperous, but the gold mines were preserved by nature for Americans only, who possess noble hearts . . . .

It was widely believed that some of the Chinese who came into San Francisco harbor were hardly free to seek their own occupation. A legislative committee spoke disapprovingly of "the importation by foreign capitalists of immense numbers of Asiatic serfs. . . ." A brief news note from the *Monthly Record of Current Events in Harper's* reported an incident in this procurement of Chinese labor for the American West.

From Manila we learn that the American ship *Waverley*, with Chinese laborers, had put into that port to bury her captain. While there, a revolt took place on board, and the mate, it is alleged, shot two or three coolies, drove the rest below, and then went ashore to bury the captain. Upon his return the hatches were opened, and it was found that out of 450 men, 251 had died from suffocation. The mate and crew had been arrested by the Spanish authorities.

This brief news account is buried in the midst of a larger paragraph and without heading. The entire event never created a ripple in the movements of masses of Asians across the Pacific. It was no "Black Hole of Calcutta" incident.

The Chinese laundryman became from the early immigrants a fixture of Western America. The first sailors to the Orient had found that the Chinese did good washing, as in pidgin English they would solicit laundry of captains and mates with the promotional speech, "Me washa closy all plopa." A Chinese laundry appeared on the fringe of the old plaza in San Francisco at the beginning of the fifties and reduced the cost of washing shirts from the previously accepted price of eight dollars a dozen to five dollars. Competition soon reduced the price to three

dollars a dozen. The China Boys were soon doing most of the menial work in San Francisco and in other communities as well. They washed, scrubbed, cooked, served, and carried. They made good gardeners and repairmen. They cobbled shoes. In fact, they were soon in far away Massachusetts making shoes, in some instances sent there as strikebreakers. They were adaptable to handling machinery, and as peaceful, dependable, sober, steady workmen they found a place wherever work was to be done.

They also became shopkeepers. M. Huc, as reported in *Harper's New Monthly*, characterized them as a nation of traders:

If the Chinese have any object in life, it is trade and money. They are born speculators. As soon as a boy can walk, he begins to traffic with his companions. His life is spent in buying and selling, and he will close a bargain with his last breath. It is all the same to him whether the traffic be legal or illegal, honest or dishonest. From selling a house to playing at cards or dice, they are ready for anything which seems to promise gain.

Stevenson said that the Caucasians hated them because:

the Mongols were their enemies in that cruel and treacherous battlefield of money. They could work better and cheaper in half a hundred industries . . . their dexterity and frugality enable them to underbid the lazy and luxurious Caucasian.

But in his economic competition with Americans the Chinaman had further preparation than being dexterous and frugal. His whole Chinese heritage down the centuries had prepared him to work with no regard for union hours or vacations. He accepted work and drudgery with endless patience, whether on farm or in shop or as a scholar with his books. But beyond this competition—and a part of it—was the everlasting foreignness of the pig-tailed Chinaman, with his occasional pipe of opium, his strange foods, and his insistence that his bones must be buried with his ancestors.

The circumstances were ready made for suspicion and hostility. The wonder is that mob violence and bloodshed were not more widespread than they were. The frontier Americans could easily regard the Chinaman as somehow sub-human. Stories were always going the rounds. One miner told of another fair and honest miner sitting by a roadside waiting for a China-

man to come along "so that he could rob him." Another honorable man, finding himself without means properly to celebrate the approaching Christmas season, robbed a Chinese to secure funds for a proper observance of that holy season.

The Chinese were almost entirely without recourse to the American law courts. Their testimony was not acceptable. They did not understand the white man's oath on the Bible, and language difficulties always were a barrier. They wished to avoid contact with the law. Among the Chinese themselves were channels of pressure and punishment of offenders against the decorum of their own community—and the Caucasians buzzed with talk of the mysterious "six companies," "tongs," "tong warfare"—as well as of opium dens, prostitution, and gambling. It was the common belief

That for ways that are dark  
And for tricks that are vain  
The heathen Chinee is peculiar

as Bret Harte through Truthful James set the entire nation to discussing. Everywhere people laughed over Ah Sing and his Euchre game.

But such exotic and titillating overtones only accompanied the oft-repeated complaint that "We are ruined by Chinese cheap labor"; hence not only Bill Nye, but also many another Westerner "went for that heathen Chinee." Minor riots, an occasional burning of property, and deaths dotted the trails of the Chinese over all of the West for a generation and more. In 1859 the Shasta County residents were so convinced that terrorism was "the best means of ridding themselves of the presence of the moon-eyed sons of the Orient" that the governor took action to restore order in the county.

When Irish employees were hard to find in building the Central Pacific Railroad, the employers turned to China for labor. At first, in 1864, a few Chinese were employed as laborers for a trial. Their willing dependability and industry demonstrated to the satisfaction of the builders that "moon-eyed sons of the Orient" could fulfill their needs. Laborers from China were brought over by the thousand, until about nine thousand Chinese and one thousand whites, mostly Irishmen, were laying



rails east to meet the Union Pacific. On May 10, 1869, President U.S. Grant received the telegram:

Sir, we have the honor to report that the last rail is laid, the last spike is driven. The Pacific Railroad is finished.

The ceremony took place at Promontory Point, Utah. The last two rails of the Union Pacific were laid by Irishmen. The joining two rails of the Central Pacific were laid by a gang of pig-tailed Chinese laborers. Thus the crossing of the Atlantic and the Pacific was symbolized in that meeting. The Rev. John Todd, pastor of the Congregational Church of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, who was a tourist on the first through train from Boston to San Francisco, said a prayer before the sound of the hammers on the golden spike went out over every Western Union wire of the nation. The two facing engines touched noses as their cow catchers were bathed in champagne.

Bret Harte celebrated the occasion with a poem, "What the Engines Said." When the engine from the East spoke boastfully of the Atlantic and its offerings, the Western engine responded scornfully,

You brag of your East! You do?  
Why, I bring the East to *you*!  
All the Orient, all Cathay,  
Find through me the shortest way;  
And the sun you follow here  
Rises in my hemisphere.

Within the year Stevenson was to meditate as he crossed the wild places of Wyoming on the wonder of how "pig-tailed Chinese pirates worked side by side with border ruffians and broken men from Europe" building a railroad to bear him, a poor emigrant, for twelve pounds from the Atlantic to the Golden Gate.

It was inevitable that the stock figure of the pig-tailed Chinaman should find a place in the lower levels of American fiction. One example can serve to indicate the pattern which was frequently used—and, for that matter, has also occurred in many American movies. Horatio Alger, Jr., in *The Young Miner*, has drawn the stock picture of this cunning visitor from the strange East. Alger's style is plain, simple, and clear, showing the main lines of the character with no confusing shades or baffling paradoxes. Ah Sin was the name of this Chinese, and sin could well be said to be a part of his nature.

His face was smooth and bland, and wore an expression of childlike innocence which was well calculated to deceive. Ah Sin possessed the usual craft of his countrymen, and understood very well how to advance his worldly fortunes. He belonged to the advance guard of immigrants from the Flowery Kingdom.

Ah Sin's wants were simple. Two bags of rice would satisfy him indefinitely.

Ah Sin had a companion, a confederate, named Ah Jim, and these two sons of Confucius were alike:

The same smooth face, the same air of childlike confidence, the same almond eyes, a pig tail of the same length, a blouse and loose pants of the same coarse cloth, were characteristics of both.

These two heathen Chinese, with their characteristics of guile, innocent appearance, and deceit, watched a robber deprive a wayfarer of his sack of gold dust. They watched the robber bury the gold dust and lie down beside it to sleep. Here the guile of the Chinese entered into action. They did not mind robbing the robber. With a slender, stiletto-like knife they dug up the bag, removed the gold dust, filled the bag again with sand, reburied it, leaving all in appearance as before. It was well for the robber that the stealth of the Chinese did not disturb his slumbers, for—as Alger says—"A Chinaman does not set a high value upon human life" and had this certain robber but rolled or muttered in his sleep "the long stiletto would have been plunged into (him) before he was well aware of what was going on."

Alger had another point which he wished to make clear about the Chinese character. Neither of these Celestials experienced "inconvenience from the possession of a conscience." On the contrary, their peace of mind and serenity were boundless.

These children of Confucius looked so serenely virtuous, so innocent of guile, that the most experienced detective would have seen nothing in their faces indicating any guilty knowledge of the lost treasure.

If Alger was a kind of sub-rosa school teacher for a generation of American boys, it is no wonder that the boys shuddered in thrilled suspense as they passed the innocent Chinese vegetable man, suspecting that he had a curved sword concealed somewhere handy among his loose flowing garments.

Alger's path probably never crossed that of the Chinese

immigrants in America. He was drawing on—and furthering—the popular stereotype. This accepted stock conception of the Chinese in America, as it was reported regularly in magazine and newspaper, involved not only their personal appearance and character but also a generalized view of their living quarters and habits. They were present in all the western villages and cities. They usually had quarters or a section of town somewhat apart from other residents, a Chinese quarter or Chinatown—a shacktown of wooden structures one story high, with narrow passage ways, not to be dignified by the name *street*, running among them.

In these mundane, tumble-down quarters they led a mysterious and intriguing night life that to the young gossips of the community was tinged with sin. Their liquor jugs looked unfamiliar; around their quarters were heavy odors of incense and burning joss-sticks; innocent lottery tickets—or even laundry bills—were written in the mysterious brush pictograph. Opium was of course present in every Chinatown—at least in the popular conception of every Chinatown. The Chinese merchants, with their bland and easy manners, purveyed a multitudinous mystery—pagan gods, incense, birds' nests—materials "curious to behold, impossible to imagine the use of, and beyond our ability to describe," to quote the *Virginia City Territorial Enterprise*. Chinese eating places were also always a part of every western community, with the opportunity of eating—or trying to eat—with chop-sticks.

Fortunately some competent writers in America came directly into contact with the Chinese, sympathized with them, and had an understanding of the underlying cultural differences between the Oriental and the Occidental. The two Americans, Mark Twain and Bret Harte, both of whom knew the western American scene in all its bizarre heterogeneity, and the Scotsman Robert Louis Stevenson, who resided for a time in California,—these three have given to the literature of the world a more valid picture of the transplanted pig-tailed Chinaman than that of the Alger stereotype.

Mark Twain in *Roughing It* uses a variety of adjectives and phrases to characterize them personally: quiet, peaceable,

patient, tractable, quick to learn, obedient, free from drunkenness, tirelessly industrious.

In California they rent little patches of ground and do a deal of gardening. They will raise surprising crops of vegetables on a sand pile. They waste nothing. What is rubbish to a Christian, a Chinaman carefully preserves and makes useful in one way or another. He gathers up all the old oyster and sardine cans that white people throw away, and procures marketable tin and solder from them by melting. He gathers up old bones and turns them into manure.

They did not ever seem to "loaf," as the American reclined in the shade, whittling and talking. They were as industrious as the day is long. There never was, Mark Twain affirmed, a lazy one.

So long as a Chinaman has strength to use his hands he needs no support from anybody; white men often complain of want of work, but a Chinaman offers no such complaint; he always manages to find something to do. He is a great convenience to everybody—even to the worst class of white men, for he bears the most of their sins, suffering fines for their petty thefts, imprisonment for their robberies, and death for their murders.

While Twain uses his light touch, his jests, and his humor in speaking of the Chinese, as he does in almost all of his writing, still there is an underlying serious respect for what he saw to be a long-suffering and abused group of fellow human beings.

They are a kindly disposed, well-meaning race, and are respected and well treated by the upper classes, all over the Pacific coast. No California *gentleman or lady* ever abuses or oppresses a Chinaman, under any circumstances, an explanation that seems to be much needed in the East. Only the scum of the population do it—they and their children; they, and, naturally and consistently, the policemen and politicians, likewise, for these are the dust-licking pimps and slaves of the scum, there as well as elsewhere in America.

In many a community friendship of a sort had developed with the Chinese. When these visitors celebrated their various festival days with eating and weird music and gay colors, friendly children and neighbors were always welcome to eat the conventional candies and sweetmeats brought from China and the vegetables and pickled pork from the decorated tables. The melting pot idea of America brought peoples from around the world together in friendly understanding as well as in discord and friction and suspicion.

Bret Harte made an attempt to present two genuine Chinese characters as individual human beings in the story, "Wan Lee, The Pagan," published in 1874. The story not only is sympathetic to the cultural differences of the Chinese, but it is also caustically ironical of Americans' treatment of them. We are introduced to Hop Sing as a Chinese gentleman and business man.

Before I describe him, I want the average reader to discharge from his mind any idea of a Chinaman that he may have gathered from the Pantomime. . . . He was, on the whole, a rather grave, decorous, handsome gentleman. His complexion, which extended all over his head except where his long pig-tail grew, was like a very nice piece of glazed brown paper-muslin. His eyes were black and bright. . . . his nose straight and delicately formed, his mouth small, and his teeth white and clean. He wore a dark blue silk blouse. . . . He wore also a pair of drawers of blue brocade gathered tightly over his calves and ankles, offering a general sort of suggestion that he had forgotten his trousers that morning, but that, so gentlemanly were his manners, his friends had forbore to mention the fact to him. . . . He spoke French and English fluently. In brief, I doubt if you could have found the equal of this Pagan shopkeeper among the Christian traders of San Francisco.

Hop Sing does not lose his dignity or go into a dance. He acts, in the story, his Oriental part. On the other hand, we have Wan Lee, a pagan boy,—all boy, boy in any language, mischievous and impish, but also dependable and alert. He is quick, active, and intelligent—and a little pagan with his porcelain god in his pocket.

Harte has a vehicle for expressing his indignation against smug prejudice and his sympathy for the insulted and injured underdog. He uses irony in having Hop Sing write to the narrator of the story, asking him to take Wan Lee away from San Francisco:

If you can use him there, you will do me a favor, and probably save his life, which is at present in great peril from the hands of the younger members of your Christian and highly civilized race who attend the enlightened schools in San Francisco.

Later the ominous note is justified. We get a glimpse of the young orphan Wan Lee taken into the home of a Christian widow with a daughter who is a friend and companion to the pagan. He, with his Chinese dexterity, makes her marvelous toys from carrots or turnips. She gives him a yellow ribbon for

his pigtail, and she even takes him to Sunday School, with his little porcelain god in his pocket. They get along well together, but two days of rioting comes to that city by the Golden Gate. Hop Sing summons his friend to behold the end of Wan Lee—

Dead, my reverend friends, dead! Stoned to death in the streets of San Francisco, in the year of grace, eighteen hundred and sixty-nine, by a mob of half-grown boys and Christian school-children!

Wan Lee's porcelain god is "crushed by a stone from the hands of those Christian iconoclasts!"

That indignant emotional defense of a despised people is one side of this story of Wan Lee; the other side is an appreciative word for the wisdom and culture of the Confucian tradition. The gracious Hop Sing invites his guests with a grace and charm which is indeed from the Flowery Kingdom. The philosopher and the host merge in the writer of this invitation:

To the stranger the gates of my house are not closed; the rice-jar is on the left, and the sweetmeats on the right, as you enter.

Two sayings of the Master:

Hospitality is the virtue of the son and the wisdom of the ancestor.

The superior man is light-hearted after the crop-gathering, he makes a festival.

When the stranger is in your melon patch observe him not too closely, inattention is often the highest form of civility.

The pleasure of your company is requested. . . .

Stevenson once observed a burly, thick-set Chinese desperado swaggering drunkenly with pistols, rasping out oaths in blackguard English. Stevenson did not relish the sight, but he did not draw false conclusions. In his quiet manner he observed that there is no virtue to be gained by combining in one person the depravities of two races and of two civilizations. A half century in Western America, where a quarter of a million pig-tailed Chinese worked with the other settlers, did not bring into the usable channels of democratic action an adequate understanding of the virtues of either American or Chinese culture or the potential good will of either great people. The beauty and wisdom of the ancient lands of the East had a hard time winning a hearing. The strange still had its element of strangeness even after a generation.

Before the Exclusion Act of 1882 brought a pause in Chinese

migration, the presence of this alien and transient population had been for three decades a subject for political discussion and for demagogic appeal to racial tensions, narrow self-interest, and prejudice.

Commodore Robert W. Shufeldt, who was in the Far East as a special negotiator for the United States in the attempt to conclude mutually satisfactory trade agreements and treaties with Korea, entered unwittingly into the public clamor over the Chinese in America. Shufeldt was in China as the seat of his negotiations with the representatives of Korea. He wrote a personal and private letter to this friend Senator Aaron A. Sargent of California, who was urging the exclusion of Chinese. Shufeldt's letter, even though private, seemed to Sargent too valuable and too pertinent—and useful, politically—to be retained as a private communication. He gave it to the press and because of its content and the position of the writer it gained a place in the national and international discussion of the Chinese.

Six months residence in Pekin, Shufeldt wrote,

has convinced me that deceit and untruthfulness pervade all intercourse with foreigners; that an ineradicable hatred exists, and that any appeal across this barrier, either of sympathy or gratitude, is entirely idle. The only appeal or argument appreciated is force. . . . All sympathy will be construed into weakness, all pity into fear.

Senator Sargent made the most of this letter, which politically supported his hand.

However, there were other men in public life who were making pleas to preserve the traditional American concept of democracy and equality of treatment. Senator Buckner of Missouri said that the passage of the Exclusion Act would consign to the grave all sentiment as to the equality of the races of men. Senator Hawley of Connecticut made a basic and significant plea: "Make the conditions what you please for immigration and for attaining citizenship," he told his fellow senators, "but make them such that a man may overcome them. Do not base them on the accidents of humanity." This was the ultimate appeal that one could make for the Chinese at the close of those three decades which brought the East in all its strangeness to the West.

Early in the 1850's George William Curtis, a New Englander who had never been West, wrote in *The Potiphar Papers*,

If I fly from a Chinaman because he wears his hair long like a woman, I must equally fly from the Frenchman because he shaves his like a lunatic. The story of Jack Spratt is the apologue of the world.

The Westerner, Joaquin Miller, looking out over the Golden Gate, wrote in the poem "In San Francisco," 1873,

And the gate, it is God's, to Cathay, Japan,—  
And who shall shut it in the face of a man?

But a decade later the gate was shut—on racial grounds.

The pig-tailed China boys brought the Orient to American doors all over the West. The reaction to these strange visitors was mixed and shifting. But the Orient, after that troubled generation, was no longer so far away and its strangeness had been blunted. The person of the Chinese was now known in every Western community. He might be resented by some, misunderstood by many, abused by the hoodlums, used for vote-getting by the politicians. But his face, his clothing, his habits, his customs, his writing, his voice, and his odors of incense, were now no longer unknown. The problem of what to do with him in such numbers was still an international problem, but the Orient had in a real way been brought to the Occident. Cathay, the Celestial Empire, was now known through its thousands of migrant pig-tailed China boys. Chinatown was a tradition and an attraction. Looking West from California's shores the Pacific did not look so wide.



# *The Rise of American Understanding of Asia*

THE people of the United States in the early years of the republic at the end of the eighteenth and early decades of the nineteenth centuries had in the main two ideas about the Orient: first, it offered great opportunities for trade and commerce and, second, its peoples were strangely mysterious and bizarre and colorful.

The new United States was sending out ships to the Orient almost as soon as peace was made with England and even before the constitution was adopted and the first President inaugurated. *The Empress of China* was the first ship to sail from the new nation to carry the stars and stripes into Oriental seas, but it was soon followed by scores of beautiful sailing vessels, going out with skins and iron, ginseng and tobacco, nails and rum and returning with spices, tea, silk, jade, porcelain - ships carrying such romantic names as *Grand Turk*, *Levant*, *Canton Packet*, *Celestial*, *Oriental*, *Witch of the Wave*, *Sword Fish*, *Sea Witch*, *Typhoon*, *Sovereign of the Seas*. Black pepper, elephants' teeth, sandalwood and other products came to be part of the American waterfront scene. The *America* carried from Calcutta to New York in 1795 a young female elephant, the first elephant to be taken from Asia to America. With the crowds of spectators gazing on such a curiosity, this animal was sold for ten thousand dollars, a profitable venture for the enterprising captain.

Thousands of young Americans who sailed the seas formed

their impressions of the Asian world from the waterfront glimpses they had. Moreover the Orient was brought to the harbors of America by foreign ships and foreign sailors—the Barbary pirates, colorful, bearded, with silver rings in their ears. American ships returned with crewmen who wore pigtails, or shaved their heads, or tattooed their bodies, or had nose and ear rings conspicuously displayed, and who bowed before idols. Little by little the color and mystery and novelty pictured in the *Arabian Nights* became part of the American awareness of the Orient.

Thus the early understanding—or lack of understanding—which Americans had of Asia was concerned with commercial opportunities and the picture postcard or illustrated weekly aspects of those far off ancient lands.

The mid-twentieth century awareness of the Orient is of a fundamentally different level. The languages and literatures, the religious principles and practices, the cultural and social patterns and artistic achievements, the dances and costumes and folkways of Asia—all are studied in the colleges and universities, represented in museums and art centers, discussed in the magazines and in books and are represented in the homes of the American people. And the national aspirations and pride of the people are understood sympathetically.

Where one hundred and fifty years ago a few captains or commercial financiers decorated their New England or Atlantic seaboard homes with rugs and tapestries and jeweled articles from the fabulous East, now the influence of Oriental art and architecture and design enters into almost every home in the land and it is not unusual to find the wives of mill workers or carpenters from deep in the back country of America wearing dresses or using furniture or China patterned after designs of India or Persia or Japan.

A visit to an American library will show shelves of a thousand books on the history, sociology, art, religion of each section of the Asian continent and adjacent islands. The book-stores market each year millions of copies of books about Asia and discussing Asian problems. The most widely circulated magazines treat seriously the cultural achievements and problems of the Orient.

This rise of understanding in America of what Asia is, of its developments, its problems, its achievements, its hopes for the future, has not come about suddenly. It has been a gradual and steady development. It is no fad or phase of passing fancy. The attention of Americans has been directed toward the East at a few crucial times during the past century, but the real growth of understanding has been in the main apart from historical incidents or international pressure points. This growth of appreciation has been related to and fostered by the work of individual scholars, writers, artists, religious leaders, scientists, who, following their own native bent and increasing their own understanding, have been in the position of educators of the American public.

In the 1840's the group of New England Transcendentalists who published *The Dial*—Emerson, Thoreau, Alcott, Margaret Fuller, and their friends—were such a core of enthusiasts for what came to them as a new understanding of the wisdom of the ancient East. They were not looking at the contemporary but at the ancient Asia—and they found it good. Emerson found the insight of the ancient Indian scriptures “nearer to my business and bosom than is the news in today's *Boston Journal*.” Thoreau found the waters of Walden Pond and the Ganges similar. He said, “In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the Bhagvat-Geeta.” Bronson Alcott, the father of the author, Louisa May Alcott, who was editing bits of Eastern wisdom into the columns of *The Dial*, was convinced that “the gates of the East are now opening wide and giving the free commerce of mind with mind...”

Henry Thoreau was one of the most energetically minded Americans in the pursuit of understanding the Asian past. From his college days on he was a reader of Asian literature. He wrote, “The reading which I love best is the scriptures of the several nations, though it happens that I am better acquainted with those of the Hindoos, the Chinese, and the Persians, than of the Hebrews, which I have come to last.”

In 1855 he received from England a gift of forty-four volumes of Indian books, some in English and some in French, Latin, Greek, and Sanskrit. To realize that this little collection of forty-four books in the hands of Henry Thoreau of Concord,

Massachusetts, a little country village, was the best collection of its kind in America at that time is to realize how with the vast libraries, museums, art galleries, and Oriental societies now spread throughout America, the appreciation of Asia has developed over a hundred years. Few books giving the literature and cultural achievements of the Orient were then available at all in America, but Thoreau, Emerson, Alcott, and a few others were persistent in their quest for such knowledge. Thoreau himself wrote an English version of "The Transmigration of the Seven Brahmins," though he translated it from a French version and not from an Indian language, and he did not publish it, but left it in manuscript.

His *Journal* has many such passages as this one from May, 1841, concerning *The Law of Manu*:

When my imagination travels eastward and backward to those remote years of the Gods, I seem to draw near to the habitation of the morning and the dawn at length has a place. I remember the book as an hour before sunrise.

He spices his books *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* and *Walden* with references to and quotations from the literatures of the Asian civilizations. Probably no other two men have done more toward introducing an awareness of Asian thought—especially religious thought—to American readers over the past century than Emerson and Thoreau.

However, in considering the overall growth of an appreciative understanding of Asia and its problems, no group surpasses the American missionaries in their contributions.

The first American non-Roman Catholic missionaries to Asia went out in 1813, to India; the number in the Orient reached several thousand before the century was over. Every missionary was a tie between his home people and his new place of residence. By letters and reports and by the fact of his dwelling in a far away land, Americans were made aware that the distant places were not merely mysterious spots on the globe, but the habitation of ancient civilizations as well as living societies. The missionaries were focal points of interpretation and understanding of cultural patterns and social practices.

Imaginatively one can put himself back into the meeting on February 6, 1812, in the church in Salem, Massachusetts,

when five young men were consecrated to missionary work in Asia. The church was crowded to its utmost capacity. Students were present who had walked sixteen miles to attend the meeting. Five of the leading American ministers were present to consecrate the five pioneer missionaries from America to the Far East. Two of the men had young brides—one married only a day, the other to be married three days later. The effect of this consecration of missionaries was far-reaching. There was a great magazine and newspaper interest in the event. Money was raised by voluntary subscription. To many people the names Bombay and Ceylon became less words of distant mystery and more nearly words with domesticated household implication. The group of five men—three with wives—sailed in February, 1812—even in the middle of the war between England and the United States. It took Gordon Hall a year to get to Bombay, but the work he started there is still going forward, and Gordon Hall House in Byculla is still to this day a radiating center of greater understanding and co-operation between India and America.

Gordon Hall began at once upon his arrival in India to learn Marathi and Sanskrit. Later he also took up Gujarati and Hindustani. Translating, writing books in the Indian languages, printing books and making them available to Indian readers naturally called for schools to teach the illiterate. In the natural and normal course of a rising American interest in the circumstances of India, schools were opened, first for boys, and then also for girls. American men and women came out to teach, and social problems of sanitation, health, the degradation of widows, and the condition of the impoverished came to receive the understanding and attention of the missionaries and their American friends and supporters. Through the thousands of men and women who followed Gordon Hall and his associates to Asia, the Asian peoples who had before seemed so remote and mysterious were brought within the intellectual orbit of Americans.

In 1884 two Indian girls passed their matriculation examinations, the first girls in India to do so. They were Christian girls, educated in Christian institutions, and in both England and America the interest and rejoicing was great at the evidence of the rise of women to a place of free development in India.

One outstanding Indian woman, Pandita Ramabai, studied in both England and America. She published a book, *The High Caste Hindu Woman*, which aroused much interest in America. The "Ramabai Association" was formed in Boston and this remarkable woman received funds to open a school for high caste Hindu widows in Bombay, and the American understanding of and concern for people in India was doing much toward bringing to light a sense of the dignity and worth of the individual.

Tens of thousands of Americans gave interest and support to the movement toward social improvement in India. By the end of the nineteenth century the evidence of this concern for the individual welfare was apparent. In the literacy rate at the end of the century the way in which the influence of the West was exerting itself is conclusive; of the total Christian population of western India, 336 per 1,000 were literate, while of the Hindus 66 per 1,000 were literate, and of the Muslims 43 per 1,000. Among women the numbers were even more preponderant. Only 8 per 1,000 Muslim women could read and write; only 10 per 1,000 Hindu women could read and write; but 254 per 1,000 Christian women could read and write.

The influence and pressure of the Western centers of influence soon were felt more strongly in the entire Indian population and schools were opened to women, widows were permitted to marry, and women came to hold more important influences outside of the home and in Indian life.

When at the end of the century, famine and plague hit western India, the American response was quick, emphatic and widespread—indicating a ready understanding of the needs of the country. Special funds were raised over a number of years, with \$1,300,000 coming in 1900. An appeal in the *Christian Herald* resulted in a chartered steamship bringing 200,000 bushels of corn to Bombay, and the gift of 100,000 blankets for the poor. Labour also was hired by the Americans as a means of giving relief, and a church at Vadala, twenty-six buildings at Sholapur, and a school at Rahuri were built at that time.

Though the early nineteenth century American might have conceived of India as a land of snake charmers, idols, elephants,

and mysteriously veiled ladies, a land of extreme wealth and extreme poverty, and of discordant and mutually antagonistic groups of peoples—the end of the century found a much more widespread realization of the richness of its arts, the depth of its culture, the value of its philosophy, and the human quality of its people. One cannot overestimate the importance of the message concerning India which Americans have heard through the ministrations of such great men as E. Stanley Jones, Frank Laubach, and Sam Higginbottom; and China, Japan, Turkey, Lebanon, and other nations have also had their great missionary voices.

The American Protestant Christian movement began in India and it built strong ties of understanding to prepare the way for the twentieth century world. In the same way the missionary movement entered Turkey, Syria, the Holy Lands, the islands around Asia, and China. The impact of these leaders upon Asia is incalculably great, but also each one was a beam of light for America, shedding some rays of understanding of and deep concern for the underprivileged peoples of the Eastern World.

Among these nineteenth century missionaries were some great and productive men and women who left vast legacies of achievement behind them to carry forward the work of cultural tolerance and sympathy. Among these is Daniel Bliss, who founded the justly celebrated American University of Beirut, and was its president. Cyrus Hamlin also founded Robert College of Istanbul. These two Near East institutions have for ninety years served as links between America and the East. Personnel has been exchanged, news has gone abroad, and the radiation from them of human interest has been unceasing.

From the mid-century when the closed kingdoms of the Far East were opening, China has been the real heart of the American missionary endeavor. Troubled and sorrowing China has been much on the heart of the American people. At times there have been as many as five thousand Protestant American missionaries in China, learning the language, absorbing the meaning of the social patterns, picking up the literature and tradition of the long range Confucian way, and interpreting this web of life to America.

Elijah C. Bridgeman was the first American missionary in China and he set a pattern of working toward international understanding. He published for twenty years a little magazine called *Chinese Repository*, designed to spread among foreigners to China a knowledge of its laws, customs, history, literature, and the current events of the Empire. The second American missionary in China, S. Wells Williams, a printer, became a great interpreter of and spokesman for China. His books, *The Middle Kingdom* and the *History of China*, were the best available and they were widely read. James Legge, another early missionary to China, became an expert on Chinese matters, publishing *the Chinese Classics*, *Confucianism*, and *The Religions of China*. Alexander Wylie wrote on religion, science, and literature of the East, and he knew Manchu, Mongol, and the Chinese languages. Justus Doolittle published *The Social Life of the Chinese* and W. A. P. Martin published *A Cycle of Cathay*. The missionary E. T. Williams was later to serve in the American Foreign Service and then to become chairman of the Department of Oriental Languages and Literature at the University of California. Arthur Smith, missionary to China, was influential in cultivating President T. R. Roosevelt's understanding of the Far East, and Bishop James W. Bashford wrote *China, An Interpretation*.

Many other outstanding men and women in China from America contributed to learning—writing text books, translating, gathering information on natural history, folklore, botany, archaeology and the whole range of human knowledge. Of course, as in India, education was a paramount concern and the missionary teachers in China played a prominent part in the country's modern intellectual growth and development.

When one considers that the Protestant churches in America reach directly half of the population and indirectly almost all of it, one can sense the great contribution poured into the stream of American understanding of Asia by a hundred and fifty years of increasing interest since the group of college boys talked of missions for Asia under a haystack at Williams College in 1806.

In 1890 George Matheson wrote the hymn which has been used widely in Protestant Christendom:



Thine is the mystic life great India craves,  
Thine is the Parsee's sin-destroying beam,  
Thine is the Buddhist's rest from tossing waves,  
Thine is the empire of vast China's dream.  
Thine is the Roman's strength without his pride,  
Thine is the Greek's glad world without its graves,  
Thine is Judea's law with love beside,  
The truth that censures and the grace that saves.

Even the Boxer uprisings and massacres in China at the end of the century were contributing factors to the extension of understanding. The violence focussed attention upon China. But also the American government used the Boxer indemnities to pay for the education of Chinese youth in America. Thus thousands of the best Chinese youth were visitors to America over the first half of the twentieth century.

An important indirect element in the missionary movement is the number of children born abroad of missionary parents who grew up familiar with the Asian peoples and went on to become interpreters. Pearl Buck is only the outstanding current example of the many who have had that urge to speak forth clearly the truth and insight which they had of the larger world.

The institutions, foundations, and associations now in America devoting themselves largely to the task of extending interest in and understanding of the Orient are well above a hundred, a far cry from the first organization of two score interested individuals into the American Oriental Society in 1842.

When Professor P. E. Dustoor of Allahabad University was touring America in the first year of Indian Independence, speaking for the East and West Association, he found extensive academic interest in Asian subjects. In Philadelphia, at the University of Pennsylvania summer session, he found such courses as Elementary Sanskrit, Hindustani Conversation, Introduction to the Civilization and Institutions of India; Modern India: A Sociological, Economic, and Political Survey. He found also at the Iranian Institute in New York courses covering Persian, Indian, Chinese, Arabic, Burmese art culture, history, politics, economics.

When Professor Dustoor visited Stanford University he found Indian students in the library reading room consulting

the Madras newspaper *Hindu*. In San Francisco he found the World Affairs Council sponsoring a talk on China.

American literature at the mid-century was occasionally using Oriental colourings in fiction and poetry. Poe used references to Indian ottomans and tapestried Eastern hangings. Longfellow, Whittier, Lowell, and many other writers used the rich ornateness of the Arabian Nights tales, with Aladdin's lamp being the favorite object of reference. Characters in novels, as in *The Lamplighter*, went out to India or China or Persia. *St. Elmo* is filled with Orientalism. Whittier used such figures as "a complex Chinese toy" and "the well-curb had a Chinese roof."

From 1850 onwards to the end of the century the Chinese were more in the thoughts of Americans than any other Asian peoples. Not only was the missionary movement to China vigorous and extensive, but also during the 1850's the bloody revolutionary movement in China was attracting popular and official attention. Moreover the migration of Chinese to America began with the California gold rush and the settlement of the Pacific Coast and continued with increasing tempo for thirty years.

Chinese laborers came to California by the thousands and spread out from there throughout the West. They worked in mines, on the railroads, in the Columbia River fisheries. They were found in the Idaho forests, the Utah mines, on the shores of Puget Sound. Every western city or hamlet had its Chinese population, and some mining communities, like Jacksonville, Oregon, had many more Chinese than Caucasians. The Chinese became house servants, cooks, laundrymen, gardeners, as well as day laborers. They opened up shops, entered the skilled crafts, and became businessmen running hand laundries, restaurants, and vegetable stands.

The Chinese in America came with their native garb of loose pantaloons and flowing long shirt tail. They wore the shaved heads and long braided pigtail. Their language was strange and high pitched. Their writing was mysterious. The odour of joss sticks, incense, and opium pervaded their living quarters. They came with idols and strange ways.

They came as a migrant wave of men without women.

They came as aliens, to work for a time and then return to their homeland. Even those who died in America wanted their bones shipped home to the family burial ground.

Mark Twain wrote of them, in *Roughing It*, 1871, that "they are quiet, peaceable, tractable, free from drunkenness, and they are as industrious as the day is long. A disorderly Chinaman is rare, and a lazy one does not exist." Nevertheless the Chinese were the focal point for much American discussion of the Orient. They beat down wages and the cost of services, thus becoming an economic threat to American workmen. Their housing, food, and sanitation were inferior and a threat to the American standard of living. They came to America to work and they either sent home or carried home a continuous stream of money, becoming what many persons considered a drain on the American economy.

In the flux of the times the traditional policy of open immigration came under sharp criticism and Thomas Bailey Aldrich expressed what was the opinion of many Americans in the poem "Unguarded Gates":

Wide open and unguarded stand our gates,  
And through them presses a wild motley throng -  
Men from the Volga and the Tartar steppes,  
Featureless figures from the Hoang Ho,  
Malayan, Scythian, Teuton, Kelt, and Slav,  
Flying the old world's poverty and scorn;  
These bringing with them unknown gods and rites,  
Those, tiger passions, here to stretch their claws.  
In street and alley what strange tongues are loud,  
Accents of menace alien to our air,  
Voices that once the tower of Babel knew!

Aldrich here presents much of the tenor of the discussion which led America to pass the various immigration exclusion acts which have been part of American history since 1882.

Bret Harte, who knew the Chinese in San Francisco and was very sympathetic with them in some of his writing, wrote the most widely quoted lines on the Chinese and their strange ways in the poem, "Plain Language from Truthful James":

Which I wish to remark,  
And my language is plain,

That for ways that are dark  
 And for tricks that are vain,  
 The heathen Chinee is peculiar . .

Later in the poem, which recounts Ah Sin's mis-dealings at cards in a game which "he did not understand," occurs the line, "We are ruined by Chinese cheap labor" This line became a battle cry in the press and among the groups of laborers who all too frequently arose to do violence to the Chinese.

In the generation between 1850 and 1882 three hundred thousand Chinese came to the western American shores, the biggest migration of a peoples strongly alien in language, religion, and social habits and patterns which history records. When the first citizens of the Celestial Empire came to San Francisco they were welcomed with open arms and received the official hospitality of the community. But when they came in such large numbers as to defy assimilation and become not a novelty but an engulfing mass, the welcome sign was withdrawn and they were often met with curses and abuses. But whatever the feelings of particular Americans toward Chinese immigrants, the historical events at the end of the century were thrusting the United States and the Far East closer together and there was little pause in the onward flow of events until the hundreds of thousands of Americans and Chinese met within the decade in fiercer clash near the Yalu River.

During the decades of Chinese entry into America the Japanese were opening their country to Western ways and were also migrating to Hawaii and to the Pacific Coast, and Korea also was ceasing to be the Hermit Kingdom, was accepting Western missionaries and business men and sending its own sons abroad to college—including the great statesman Syngman Rhee, who went to a mission school and then studied political science under Woodrow Wilson at Princeton.

Many very able Americans during the closing decades of the nineteenth century were interesting themselves in the art and culture and spiritual heritage of the East. James Jackson Jarves published *The Art of Japan* in 1876. This was the American centennial year, one hundred years after the drawing up and signing of the American Declaration of Independence. Jarves' book was a pioneer study in America of Oriental art.

It stands at the beginning of America's second century and the eighty years which have now passed of that second century help to mark that book as a significant symbol. The paintings, etchings, ceramics, metalware, architecture, poetry, music, dance, sculpture, scriptures, philosophy, religion, folklore of these lands have been studied, admired, and used in an ever-increasing growth of popular appreciation of the Orient.

Walt Whitman was filled with an enthusiastic prophetic vision when he witnessed the ceremonial arrival of the first Japanese Ambassadorial party in New York in 1860, with Ambassador Shimmi and a party of eighty Japanese, arrayed and ordered after the Far Eastern fashion—a censor, interpreters, minor officials, barbers, pike bearers, body servants, attendants. Whitman, the new world democrat, had looked in wonder and awe at

the swart-cheek'd two-sworded envoys,

Leaning back in their open barouches, bare-headed, impassive....

Whitman's insight found expression in "A Broadway Pageant," where he imaginatively saw the coming together of the East and the West, the remaking of geography. Here the ancient Asia, the all-mother, had come facing the new world, and Whitman had a word of caution to urge upon his confident young nation, the new United States:

Bend your proud neck to the long-off mother now sending  
messages over the archipelagoes to you,

Bend your proud neck low for once, Young Libertad.

The seas to Walt Whitman seemed to be all crossed and the world truly circumnavigated, with the American transcontinental railroad completed and the Suez Canal opened. And indeed regular steamship service was established across the Pacific as it had long been across the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Travelers were going out to see the East.

In 1886 John LaFarge and Henry Adams were on their way to Japan when they were interviewed by a reporter in the mid-American State of Nebraska. The reporter inquired as to their purpose in visiting Japan. LaFarge smilingly replied that they were in search of Nirvana. The young reporter, apparently all American, replied quick as a flash: "It's out of season!" LaFarge published *An Artist's Letters from Japan* with a note to Adams recalling this incident and indicating that he recognized

he realities of the modern world: "If only we had found Nirvana," he wrote, "but he was right who warned us that we were late in this season of the world."

American scholarly travelers to the Orient were giving a solid accounting of their appreciation of the older cultures. William Sturgis Bigelow lectured and wrote on *Buddhism and Immortality*. Percival Lowell published *The Soul of the Far East*. Ernest Fenollosa wrote *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*. LaFarge, in painting murals on the courthouse in Baltimore, used Confucius as one of his subjects. Henry Adams' *Education* shows a remarkable understanding of the rising role of Asia in the world of the new century and his friend John Hay, who was the American Secretary of State, formulated the doctrine of the open door for China and worked tirelessly to prevent the disintegration of that fast crumbling ancient kingdom.

The work of Lafcadio Hearn as an interpreter of Japan to the English reading world was distinctive. He had fifteen years of residence in Japan before he died in 1906, writing many books, such as *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* and *Japan: An Interpretation*. He became a Buddhist, married into a Japanese family, was a lecturer on English literature in college and University in Japan; and he interpreted the art, literature, cultural patterns and ancient heritage of the peoples he had come to live among.

The interest in the Orient proceeded so rapidly with the turn of the century that it might almost be maintained at the present time that the proper place to study Oriental art is in the American museums—from Boston to Seattle—and in the Departments of Oriental Studies in the American Universities, from Harvard to the University of California. Archaeologists like Roy Chapman Andrews and Jack Finnigan have explored what the earth can reveal to us of the past. Histories of the literatures of Oriental countries have been supplemented by translations and adaptations of the poems, stories, and folk tales of the various peoples. Many of our writers and students of literature—Ezra Pound, Glen Hughes, Amy Lowell, John Gould Fletcher, Eugene O'Neill—have drawn upon the East in their work and dealt with the delicate flower of Oriental literature tenderly and lovingly.

Aldous Huxley has assembled his *Perennial Philosophy* to demonstrate—as Emerson said—that the universe has one bottom. Literature knows no racial or national boundaries, but crosses all seas to bring peoples into harmonious understanding. The first book printed in England was a compilation of sayings of the ancient philosophers, published in 1477 by William Caxton. It used Indian folklore and the wisdom literature of Arabia. In its use of pleasant stories and sugar-coated moral tales it was revealing something of the East to the West. In the eighteenth century another compiler of Oriental tales justified them for extending our notions and having “made the customs of the East more familiar to us than they were before, or probably ever would have been, had they not been communicated to us by the indirect, and pleasant way.”

The literature of the world and certainly that of the Orient is now abundantly available to those readers who use the English language, in well-printed and inexpensive editions. A new and readable translation of the *Bhagavat-Gita*, available for a few cents, has sold a million copies in America. The sayings of Confucius are household words. “The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyām” is almost as familiar as Mickey Mouse. The interchange of personnel in education has been a recent and gratifying by-product of the mutual understanding and appreciation which the last century has seen grow and develop.

What Thoreau recognised in 1852 is now seen as valid by many of the educated people of the world, for Thoreau wrote in his *Journal* these glowing words: “I know, for instance, that Sadi entertained once identically the same thought that I do, and thereafter I can find no essential difference between Sadi and myself. He is not Persian, he is not ancient, he is not strange to me.”

Pearl Buck has recently written that all men prefer to have food rather than to starve, to have shelter rather than to be homeless, to be healthy rather than diseased—all men, East or West.

The mystery about the peoples of the far side of the world is vanishing. There is really nothing incomprehensible in either the East or the West. The more than century long road toward understanding has brought us far toward being united nations.

